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BOOK OF THE DEAD

by Brett Halliday

What terrible secret did the book possess, that people were willing to kill for-it? 4

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The elusive book contained a secret many people wanted to possess, a secret they were willing to kill to obtain. One man had already been murdered. No one, not even Mike Shayne, would stand in the way of anyone after it!

Book Of The Dead

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

STEVE HOOVER WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANYWHERE NEAR HIS bookstore if he hadn't forgotten a book he had intended to take home with him. His primary business was the buying and selling of rare books, and the volume in question was one that he was supposed to be appraising. The store wasn't far from his apartment, so it was a simple enough matter to run back over there after dinner and pick it up.

It should have been simple. It shouldn't have been dangerous.

Hoover turned his compact car off Flagler Street and into the parking lot of the small shopping center where his store was located. As he pulled up in front of the shop, a frown creased his bearded face. A light was burning in the back, a light that usually wasn't on after hours.

A warm, humid breeze brushed Hoover's face as he got out and went to the door, peering through the glass, past the lettering that said **BOOKSTOP ON FLAGLER — USED BOOKS BOUGHT AND SOLD — RARE AND COLLECTIBLE BOOKS**. A small light was on at the front of the store, but it was always left on. The one that had Hoover concerned came from the rear of the store, where the office and storage room was located.

The night winds riffled the fronds on the palm trees next to the street. Hoover fitted his key into the lock silently, then stiffened as he saw a shadow move in the shop. He stood still for a moment then visibly relaxed.

"Hell, it must be Cary," he muttered under his breath, unlocking the door. "Sure, he's got a key. That's who it is."

Hoover had been running this business for several years, and he had never been robbed, even though he sometimes dealt in large sums of money and highly valuable books. No point in getting paranoid now, he thought. Besides, he was sure that the person inside the store had to be Cary Oldcomb.

Cary might do some strange things sometimes, but he was no burglar. Hoover smiled to himself and opened the front door of the bookstore, stepping into its shadowy interior. It hadn't even been a week since Cary had pulled one of his never-ending pranks, hiding behind a stack of books and then leaping out, brandishing a screwdriver and doing a perfect imitation of a crazed lunatic. *That* little stunt had almost been enough to make Hoover's heart fail. After that, he wasn't afraid of anything that Cary Oldcomb might do . . .

Hoover heard a sudden scurrying in the back room of the store. He shook his head and started to saunter in that direction. Halfway to the door into that room, he raised his voice to say, "Come on, Oldcomb, I know it's you back there. Whatever you're trying to pull, it's not going to work this time. You're not going to scare —"

There was a sudden flash of movement. Hoover saw a figure in the door to the storeroom, appearing there for a split-second and then vanishing in the gloom again. He stopped, suddenly nervous again, then told himself not to fall for it. Cary would have to find another victim for his practical jokes.

Hoover saw the knife then.

His eyes widened, and he tried to jerk himself to the side, but it was too late. There was an impact on his chest, almost like being thumped with a fist, then a burning, a horrible burning sensation. His legs seemed to suddenly lose all their strength. He started to slump toward the floor.

His lips moved weakly. As he tried to fight off the awful pain, he vaguely heard himself saying, "This . . . isn't . . . funny, Cary . . ."

And that was the last thing Steve Hoover ever heard.

A LITTLE OVER TWELVE HOURS LATER AND DOZENS OF blocks away on Flagler Street, a tall, brawny redheaded man opened the door of an office and stepped inside.

Michael Shayne flipped his hat onto the rack in the corner and said, "Good morning, Angel. Anything exciting on the agenda?"

Lucy Hamilton looked up from her desk, a smile on her pretty face. She inclined her head toward the door of Shayne's private office and said, "There's a potential client waiting for you, Michael. He looks like a very interesting man. I think he said he's a writer."

"What's his name?" Shayne asked.

"Cary Oldcomb."

Shayne searched his mental files for a second, then shrugged, not finding the name anywhere. He said, "Did he give you any idea what he wants?"

"No, he just said he wanted to talk to you as soon as he could. I didn't think you'd mind if he waited in your office."

There were no other pressing cases on his desk, Shayne knew. "That's fine, Angel," he said. "I'll go talk to the man."

Shayne opened the door of the inner office and strode inside. The man who had been sitting in the client's chair in front of Shayne's desk now stood, turning to face the big private detective.

Extending a hand, Shayne said, "I'm Mike Shayne, Mr. Oldcomb. What can I do for you?"

Oldcomb returned the handshake and said, "There's been some trouble, Mr. Shayne. A friend of mine has been murdered."

Shayne's eyes narrowed, and he studied Oldcomb more intently as he went around behind the big wooden desk and sat down. Oldcomb was a big man, almost as tall as Shayne himself, with broad shoulders and a burly, bear-like build. A full black beard covered the lower half of his face. His eyes were alert and active behind glasses. Shayne took out a cigarette and tipped it into his mouth, saying around it, "Do the cops know about this murder?"

"Of course," Oldcomb replied. "I called them as soon as I found the body."

"Who's dead?"

"A friend of mine named Steve Hoover. He owned the bookstore where I work."

"Your boss?" Shayne asked.

Oldcomb shook his head. "I didn't express that very well. I'm a writer, Mr. Shayne. Steve lets me work — he did let me work in his back room. There's a typewriter there, and all my reference books; I guess you could say it's like an artist's studio, a place where I happen to work well."

Shayne lit the cigarette and blew smoke toward the ceiling. "You say you found the body. Start there and tell me about it."

"All right." Oldcomb took a deep breath. "I went to the bookstore — it's called The Bookstop on Flagler — early this morning, about six o'clock, to try to get some work done. It seems I work best early in the morning. I've got my own key to the place, so I just let myself in the front door and relocked it behind me, like I usually do. Then I started toward the back of the store. That's when I saw . . . when I saw the body." Oldcomb had to pause for a moment. Shayne could tell from the tension on the man's face that he was reliving the experience. After long seconds of silence, Oldcomb went on, "He was

ying halfway behind some stacks of books. I thought at first he might have been playing a joke on me, because of what I did last week —”

“What was that?” Shayne cut in.

Oldcomb waved a hand. “Oh, just some stupid practical joke. I, uh, I guess I have a weakness for jokes. But then I realized that Steve just sn’t the type to do something like that. And I saw the blood then, oo”

SHAYNE SMOKED SILENTLY AND LET OLDComb TELL THE story in his own way. The barrel-chested writer was silent again for a time, then drew a deep, shuddery breath and went on with the story.

“I looked closer and saw the wound in his chest. He was lying on his side, so I didn’t have any trouble seeing it. I knew I shouldn’t touch anything, but I suppose I just wasn’t thinking right then. All I could think about was finding out if Steve was still alive. I checked for a pulse and didn’t find any. So the next thing I did was grab the phone and call for an ambulance. Then I called the police. They all got there about the same time.”

“And this Hoover was dead on the scene?”

“Yes,” Oldcomb nodded.

“The cops started an immediate investigation?”

“Yes, right away. There were fingerprint men there, and men from the police laboratory, and detectives all over the place. There were more people there than I ever saw in Steve’s store when he was alive, in fact. The detectives made me tell them about finding him, and then they asked me all sorts of questions, over and over.”

Shayne leaned forward and watched Oldcomb closely as he asked, “If the cops are investigating, Mr. Oldcomb, then why do you want to hire me?”

“Because I think the police have the idea that I killed him.”

Shayne lifted a craggy red eyebrow. “Why would they think that?”

“They ruled out robbery as a motive. The place wasn’t torn up or anything, and Steve never kept much money there anyway. So they think he was killed for some other reason, and I guess they think I’m the one most likely to have killed him.”

“So now you want an independent investigation?”

“Exactly. Would you be willing to take the case, Mr. Shayne?”

“What about other enemies?” As Shayne asked the question, his hand lifted to his ear, where he tugged on the lobe gently. It was an unconscious gesture, one that always signalled a growing interest on Shayne’s part. “Do you know of anybody else who might have a reason to want Hoover dead?”

“I can’t think of a soul,” Oldcomb replied. “I didn’t really have

anything to do with his business, though. I wouldn't have any idea about enemies that he might have made in that area."

"He dealt in books?"

"Rare and collectible books, for the most part. I'd say he was one of the most knowledgeable dealers in valuable books in the Miami area."

Shayne nodded, then pressed a button on his intercom. He said into the machine, "Lucy, draw up a contract for Mr. Oldcomb, standard rates and terms. And bring it in here when you're done with it, please." Snapping off the intercom, he went on, "I think you've hired yourself a private investigator, Mr. Oldcomb."

A smile creased Oldcomb's broad face, a smile tinged with sadness. "I'm glad you're taking the case. Steve was quite a fan of yours. He always read everything Tim Rourke wrote about you in the paper."

Shayne grinned. "Rourke usually makes things more interesting than they actually are. Sometimes, I think *he* should be writing fiction, rather than newspaper articles." Sitting up straight, Shayne put a more business-like tone in his voice and went on, "I want to take a look at this bookstore where the murder took place. Do you have any objections to going along?"

"No, but I don't know if the police will let you in or not. They were going to seal it up."

"I think maybe I can talk Will Gentry's boys into letting us take a look." Lucy came in as Shayne was speaking, carrying the copies of the contract. Oldcomb took a checkbook out of his jacket pocket, and several minutes later, the paperwork was completed. Shayne stood up and said, "Ready?"

"Sure. I didn't expect fast action like this," Oldcomb said.

"The longer a trail waits, the colder it gets. Let's go."

OLDCOMB DROVE HIS OWN CAR, AND SHAYNE FOLLOWED IN his Buick. It was just after ten o'clock in the morning, and the trip down Flagler Street didn't take too long. Shayne pulled into the little shopping center's parking lot behind Oldcomb, noting as he did so the unmarked sedan in front of the bookstore that he knew to be a police vehicle. As Shayne got out of his car and started to join Oldcomb on the sidewalk, he saw a tall young man come out of the bookstore.

"Hello, Lee," Shayne nodded. "Are you about finished in there?"

Lieutenant Lee Darrell of the Miami Homicide Squad cast a suspicious eye at Shayne and Oldcomb and said, "Don't tell me you're mixed up in this, Mike? Doesn't seem like your type of case."

"It's murder, isn't it? All right if I go inside with Mr. Oldcomb here and take a look around?"

Darrell frowned. Like most of the men on the force of Chief Will

Gentry, he had a healthy respect for Shayne, but the big redhead was still a private operator. He said, "Have you asked the chief about this?"

Shayne shook his head. "No, but I imagine you'll tell Will about it soon enough. All I want to do is look around, Lee. You can watch me if you want to."

Darrell's shoulders went up and down in a shrug. "Go ahead. But the only reason I'm letting you do this is because there's no evidence in there for you to tamper with."

Shayne grinned and stepped past the young officer. "Thanks, Lee. Come on, Oldcomb."

The two men went into the bookstore. Shayne paused just inside the front of the store and looked around. The bookshop consisted of a long, fairly narrow room, with shelves jutting out from one side and an aisle running down the other. There were books of all vintages and types everywhere Shayne looked. He saw a door at the back of the room and asked Oldcomb, "What's back there?"

"That's where I work. It's just a combination office and store room. I'll show it to you."

"First, show me where the body was."

Oldcomb swallowed, his face paling slightly at the request. But he took Shayne down the aisle toward the rear, stopping to point out the bloodstains on the floor. "Right there," he said. "That's where I found him."

There was a chalk outline on the floor, and Shayne felt some of the anger he always felt at murder as he looked at it. His keen grey eyes scanned the murder scene quickly, but they found nothing that meant anything to him. The same thing was true in Oldcomb's office. The whole place looked innocuous enough, not at all the kind of surroundings you would expect to find a homicide in.

Shayne picked up a book at random from a box sitting next to the desk in the back room and flipped through it idly, noting the aged condition of it. He said to Oldcomb, "Is there anything you can tell me about the people Hoover did business with?"

"Like I said, I was never involved with Steve's business that much. Of course, I did hear some names from time to time. There was one man, I can't remember his name right offhand, who bought and sold a lot of books through Steve. And I do remember the last person he had any major dealings with. She sold him that box of books you got that one from, in fact."

"You remember her name?"

"I believe it was Boothe. I don't remember her first name, though." Oldcomb smiled. "I saw her once. She was quite a looker. She had a nice English accent, too."

Shayne nodded. "It's a place to start. While I'm looking for her, you see if you can remember the name of that other man, the one who did a lot of business with Hoover." He looked around at the clutter in the store and asked, "How did anybody keep up with all of this?"

With a shrug, Oldcomb said, "Steve had the kind of mind that could keep track of what he had on hand. I don't think he wrote very much down, or kept very complete records."

"That might make things harder. Did you tell the cops about this Boothe woman?"

Oldcomb shook his head. "I just remembered her. Do you think I should tell them?"

Shayne grinned and said, "Eventually. Right now, I'll check it out." He turned and started to walk back to the front of the shop.

Oldcomb's hand on his arm stopped him. Shayne glanced back, to find the writer regarding him with an intense stare. Oldcomb said, "You will find out who killed him, won't you, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne returned the stare for a moment, then nodded abruptly and promised, "I'll find the killer."

II

THERE WERE SEVERAL BOOTHE'S IN THE MIAMI AREA PHONE books, but with Shayne and Lucy both working on the problem after he returned to the office, it took them less than half an hour to find the right one.

Her name was Pamela Boothe, and she admitted freely to Shayne that she had recently sold a collection of books to Steve Hoover. When Shayne asked her if he could pay her a visit, she hesitated for a moment, then said, "Would you mind terribly telling me what this is all about? I know you said that you're a private detective, but I don't see why you would need to talk to me."

Shayne waged a quick mental debate, then decided to tell her the truth. If she was involved with Hoover's murder in any way, then she already knew he was dead, and if she wasn't, she would still be finding out about the killing as soon as she looked at an afternoon paper. He said, "I'm afraid Steve Hoover was killed last night, Ms. Boothe. I'm looking into the case."

There was a second of silence, and then Pamela Boothe said, "You mean he was murdered?"

"That's right. His body was found at his store this morning. He had been stabbed in the chest."

Again there was a pause on the other end of the phone. Shayne had a cigarette in his mouth as he leaned back in his office chair, and he took advantage of the opportunity to light it. As he got it going, Pamela Boothe said, "Of course I'll talk to you, Mr. Shayne. I haven't the

foggiest what I might know that would help you, but anything I can do”

“Fine. Where can I find you?”

She gave him an address. Shayne made a note of it and then said, “I’ll be there in about an hour, if that’s all right with you?”

“Certainly. Goodbye, Mr. Shayne.”

Shayne said goodbye and hung up, then went into the outer office to perch a hip on the corner of Lucy’s desk.

“I’ll be meeting her at one, Angel,” he said. “There’s time for us to grab a quick lunch, if you’d like.”

“Sounds good to me, Michael. Let me get my purse.”

They dined at a small restaurant not far from the office, where the staff knew Shayne and made sure the service was efficient. Shayne attacked a steak with gusto, accompanying it with plenty of potatoes and salad. He thoroughly enjoyed the meal, as did Lucy, and then they headed back to the building on Flagler, where they spent many of their working hours.

“Just let me out in front of the door,” Lucy told Shayne as the Buick cruised down the street. “You need to get on to your meeting.”

Shayne pulled up at the curb and leaned over to give her a quick kiss. “See you later, Angel,” he told her as she got out. With a wave, he eased back out into the traffic and headed north.

THE ADDRESS PAMELA BOOTHE HAD GIVEN HIM WAS IN Miami Beach. Shayne crossed Biscayne Bay to the town still known in some circles as the Magic City. The growing crime rate, and other problems, had taken some of the luster from the Miami area, but it still had an excitement to it that Shayne had found nowhere else.

His destination was in a high-class, high-rent residential district. The buildings were a mixture of private homes, apartment houses, and condominiums. It turned out to be one of the latter that Shayne was looking for.

He turned off of a palm-lined boulevard into the parking lot of the complex and found a place to leave the Buick. It took only a couple of minutes to locate the unit he was looking for. Pamela Boothe’s condominium was in a building with two others, one of several buildings scattered around the landscaped grounds. Shayne pressed a blunt finger against the doorbell and waited.

When the door opened, Shayne wasn’t surprised at the appearance of the woman who stood there. She was slim and elegant in a silk pantsuit, with short-cut brunette hair and an attractive face. Shayne put her age between thirty and thirty-five and thought she was a damn nice-looking woman. He said, “Ms. Boothe? I’m Mike Shayne.”

She extended a hand with slender fingers that turned out to be soft

and cool. "How nice to meet you, Mr. Shayne. I'm Pamela Boothe. Won't you please come in?"

Shayne followed her through a foyer and down two steps into a sunken living room with expensive furniture placed carefully in all the right spots on the thick carpet. There was even a fireplace, though Shayne doubted that it had ever been used. An armchair stood in front of it, though, and a man was raising himself from that armchair.

The man extended a hand toward Shayne and said, "Mr. Shayne! How wonderful to meet you. Hope you don't mind; I just dropped by, and Pam told me she was expecting you. I sort of invited myself to stay, so that I could meet you."

Shayne was a little taken aback by this enthusiastic welcome, but he tried not to show it. Pamela Boothe said, Mr. Shayne, this is my cousin, Malcolm Parker. He's visiting Miami on his vacation."

Shayne shook Parker's hand and grunted a greeting. Parker was a couple of inches shorter than Shayne, with a narrow body, short blond hair that waved slightly, and an ingratiating smile. He said, "I certainly envy you, Mr. Shayne, living here in Florida. What a wonderful climate! Nothing at all like England."

"Are you from England, too, Ms. Boothe?" Shayne asked.

"Originally," she answered. "I've been over here for the last ten years, though. Now, what's this about poor Mr. Hoover being murdered?"

"I'm afraid it's true."

"Why haven't the police been around to see me, then?"

"I'm sure they just haven't gotten around to it yet. They'll be talking to you, you can count on that." Shayne didn't tell her that, for the moment, the cops didn't know of her business dealings with Hoover. They would find out, though, he felt confident of that. Then they would be around to see her.

"What is it you'd like to know? I still don't see how I can help you, Mr. Shayne."

Malcolm Parker was settling back down in his armchair, gazing at Shayne raptly, like a child about to get his hands on a new toy. Shayne sighed and tried to ignore him. He asked, "You did just sell some books to Hoover, didn't you? I want to be sure I'm talking to the right person."

"I assure you, I did sell the books to Mr. Hoover. They were a collection of esoterica assembled by my great-grandfather, Sir John Beechmuir Boothe, twenty books in all. Is there some question about the sale? It was all legal and above-board, I can promise you that."

"Nobody's saying that it wasn't," Shayne assured her. "But you were one of the last people to do any real business with Hoover before he was killed. Did you notice anything unusual about him?"

"I don't know. I only saw him a time or two, so I can't really say what was normal behavior for him and what wasn't. I do know he didn't seem to be overly concerned or upset about anything, though. It was quite a pleasure to deal with him."

"And the books were your only connection with Hoover?"

"Yes." Pamela smiled. "I wasn't carrying on with him if that's what you're getting at, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne smiled back at her. "It was. Did he give you a fair price on the books?"

"Oh, yes, I thought he was generous. He gave me one hundred and seventy-five dollars."

Shayne rubbed a thumb along his jaw as he speculated before asking the next question. "You said those books came down to you from your great-grandfather. Didn't it bother you to sell them?"

Pamela waved a hand around at the luxurious living room. "I make a good living, Mr. Shayne. My services as a decorator are in demand. But one can never have too much money. The books were just lying around here, collecting dust, and I'm not the one who collected them in the first place. I was glad I found someone who was willing to pay a decent price for them. I still have tons of stuff that was handed down from Sir John."

For the first time since Shayne had started questioning Pamela, her cousin spoke up from the armchair by the fireplace. Malcolm Parker said, "I'm afraid my cousin doesn't share the same feelings I do for the old and rare, Mr. Shayne. Especially things connected with the Boothe family."

"You've always had a stronger sense of family than I do, Malcolm," she told him. "Perhaps it's something hereditary in your branch of the family." Pamela turned back toward Shayne and went on, "Malcolm recently purchased the old family mansion in England and is restoring it."

Parker took out a pipe and tobacco and started packing it as he said, "One must have something to do with one's spare time."

Shayne was glad it wasn't four o'clock yet, or they'd be offering him tea and crumpets.

"You can't think of anything Hoover said or did that would indicate he was worried about something?" he asked, trying to get the conversation back on the track. "It might not have seemed important at the time."

Pamela shook her head. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Shayne. I just don't think I can remember anything like that at all."

Shayne took one of his cards out of a pocket and handed it to her, saying, "If you do happen to remember something, would you call me?"

"I'm always available at one of those numbers, any time of the day or night."

"Of course. I'd be happy to. But I don't think I'll be remembering anything like that. There's nothing to remember."

"Well, thanks for your time, anyway."

Shayne started to turn to leave, when Parker said, "How about a drink, old man?"

Shayne grinned and said, "No thanks. Maybe another time." He had to resist the impulse to say something stereotypically British, like *cheerio*. He wasn't sure Parker would understand . . .

THE VISIT TO PAMELA BOOTHE HAD PROVED TO BE FUTILE, but Shayne tried not to worry about the loss of time as he drove back to his office. What he had to do now was to find another trail, another strand of the fabric that would lead him to a killer when it was unravelled. He was wondering what that new trail would be when he walked into the office and found Lucy Hamilton with the phone to her ear.

She said into the receiver, "Just a moment, Mr. Oldcomb. Mr. Shayne just came in." Covering the mouthpiece, she extended it to Shayne and went on, "It's Oldcomb. He says he remembered something you asked him about."

"I'll take it right here," Shayne said, taking the phone from Lucy with one hand while scaling his hat onto the rack with the other. Into the phone, he said, "Shayne. What's up, Oldcomb?"

Cary Oldcomb's deep voice came back at him. "I remembered the name of that other book dealer I was telling you about, Mr. Shayne, the one who did a lot of business with Steve. I'm not one hundred percent sure about this, but I think his name was Whitley."

Shayne pointed at the Miami phone book, and Lucy handed it to him. Flipping through it rapidly, he found the listing in the yellow pages for book dealers and ran a blunt fingertip down them until he came across one for Austin Whitley. Shayne said, "Thanks, Oldcomb. I'll check it out. Be sure to let me know if you think of anything else that might be important."

"Sure. Have you talked to the Boothe woman yet?"

"Yeah, but she wasn't able to help. You were right, though; she is a fine-looking woman." Aware of the look that Lucy gave him after that comment, Shayne said goodbye and hung up, then reached for his hat again.

"Going out again?" Lucy asked.

Shayne grinned. "I thought I'd go see this Whitley character. Maybe he's got some answers."

Lucy nodded. "A detective's work is never done," she said sweetly.

III

AUSTIN WHITLEY'S BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENT WAS IN A private home on a side street just off of one of Miami's major boulevards. It was an old house, Shayne saw as he parked the Buick at the curb in front of it, with a steep, gabled roof and ivy growing on its red brick walls. The whole place looked thoroughly respectable, and the only indication that it was a business was a small sign in the front window that said AUSTIN WHITLEY, ANTIQUARIAN BOOKS.

A cobblestone walk led up to the front door through a neatly-trimmed lawn. Shayne followed it onto a tiny porch and found the doorbell button on the jamb. He hadn't called in advance this time, and as he rang the bell and heard the chiming inside, he hoped that Whitley was home.

The door swung open a moment later. A stocky man in a suit peered out at Shayne and asked, "Yes, may I help you?"

"Are you Austin Whitley?" Shayne asked. The man was prematurely bald, with only a fringe of hair around his head. His face was broad, his eyes small. He nodded in answer to Shayne's question.

"Yes, I'm Austin Whitley. Are you here to look at some books? I only do business by appointment."

Shayne wondered if he really looked like the type who would be interested in old books. He said, "No, Mr. Whitley, I'm here on business of my own. My name is Mike Shayne; I'm a private detective."

Whitley's forehead wrinkled in a frown. "A detective? I assure you, Mr. Shayne, all of my business is perfectly legal —"

"It's about the murder of Steve Hoover," Shayne cut in on his protestations. "Could I come in and ask you a few questions?"

Whitley's attitude changed immediately. He sighed and said, "I was afraid it was about poor Steve. The police have already been here, Mr. Shayne, and asked every conceivable question. Can't you just go talk to them?"

"I'd rather hear it from you." It was news to Shayne that the cops were ahead of him on Whitley. He wondered how they had found out about the book dealer.

"Well, if you insist . . . Anyway, I do want to do whatever I can to see that Steve's killer is brought to justice. Come on in."

Shayne followed him into the house, noting the many books on the shelves that lined the walls. The house was all dark wood and clutter, not a typical Florida dwelling at all. Living in a place like this might make a person claustrophobic, he thought.

Whitley turned to face him and said, "Could I get you a drink?"

"Cognac, if you've got it," Shayne replied.

"Certainly." Whitley went to a bar in one corner of the stuffy living room and splashed the liquor from a decanter into a glass, pouring one for himself, too. "Here you are," he said, handing the drink to Shayne. "Now, would you mind telling me what connection you have with this awful business?"

"I've been hired to conduct an independent investigation," Shayne said, then took a sip of the cognac. "I'm not at liberty to disclose my client's identity right now."

"The police don't like private detectives investigating an open case, do they?"

"They've learned to put up with me," Shayne grinned. "How did they know to come see you?"

"Evidently they found my name among Steve's records and saw that he and I have done a great deal of business over the years. How did you find out about me, Mr. Shayne?"

It was a fair question, Shayne thought. "My client told me that you and Hoover did a lot of business. I'm afraid I'll be asking you a lot of the same questions that the cops did. How was your relationship with Hoover?"

Whitley shrugged. "Amicable. I wouldn't say that we were close friends or anything like that, but our dealings were always pleasant."

"You bought books from him and sold them to him?"

"Bought, for the most part. Every book dealer has his regular clients, Mr. Shayne. When one of my customers wanted a certain book and Steve was able to obtain it, I would buy it from him. From time to time, I would buy several books from him to hold as an investment. Occasionally, one of his clients would want a book that I had, and then the dealings would go the other way. That was infrequent, though."

"You had no reason to wish Steve Hoover dead then?"

Whitley's thin lips curved in a smile. "You're asking if I killed him, just like the police did. And the answer, Mr. Shayne, is no. I did not kill Steve. I'll save you the trouble of asking the next one. I was having dinner with friends last night and was with them until midnight. Now, I don't know exactly when Steve was killed, but that answer seemed to clear me as far as the police are concerned."

Whitley was sharp, there was no doubt about that. Shayne swallowed some more of the cognac and then asked, "What about other people? Do you know of anyone else who might want Hoover dead?"

The man shook his head. "Steve and I didn't socialize. I knew him only through our business; I don't even know who his regular customers were, or his other sources for books. I'm afraid I'm not being helpful at all, Mr. Shayne. The police certainly seemed disappointed."

"Well, thanks for your time, anyway. And the drink." Shayne set his empty glass down and shook hands with Whitley. He turned back toward the door."

"Mr. Shayne," the book dealer said, stopping him. Shayne looked back. "If you do find out who killed Steve, or anything else about this tragedy," Whitley went on, "would you let me know? As I said, we weren't really close, but we were in the same business and all . . ."

"Sure," Shayne said. "I'll let you know."

But unless he came up with something better than he had so far, Shayne mused as he drove away from Whitley's house, there wouldn't be anything to tell. Unless the cops came up with something, which was always possible. Will Gentry's men were good at their job, and they would have all of Hoover's records confiscated as evidence. They would be able to find out who the murdered man's customers had been and also who else besides Pamela Boothe he had bought books from. Information like that could well lead to the killer.

IT WAS NEARLY CLOSING TIME WHEN SHAYNE GOT BACK TO the office. He filled Lucy in briefly on his general lack of progress in the case, and then she covered her typewriter, locked the file cabinet, and preceded Shayne out of the office.

They stopped for a drink just down the street, then went their separate ways. Shayne and Lucy spent many of their evenings together, but he wasn't really in the mood for company tonight. Cases that seemed to contain nothing but dead ends usually did that to him.

He drove back to his Second Avenue apartment, built himself another drink and sipped it as he looked out the window at dusk falling over the Miami River and Biscayne Bay. His mind was turning over the few facts he had come up with, and Shayne's mouth quirked in a grimace as he pondered just how little they really told him. Steve Hoover had evidently been well-liked and respected, and no one had a bad word to say about him. Was it possible for *anybody* to be that clean-cut?

Shayne was shaking his head in disgust at the whole situation and turning away from the window, ready to go into the kitchen and put together some sort of a meal, when his doorbell rang. He stopped, setting his empty glass down on his liquor cabinet. The desk clerk downstairs was supposed to call him if he had visitors coming up, but sometimes people got past the clerk. Shayne went toward the door, staying to one side of it out of instinctive caution, and called, "Who is it?"

"It's me, Mr. Shayne," a voice replied, "Jack, from downstairs."

The very desk clerk that Shayne had been wondering about. The big

redhead relaxed and reached for the doorknob, puzzled as to why Jack would be up here at his apartment. He turned the knob and started to swing the door open, saying, "What's the problem, Ja —"

The door slamming into him cut the words off.

THE DESK CLERK BARRELLED INTO THE DOOR AND THEN INTO Shayne, throwing both of them off-balance. Over Jack's shoulder, Shayne saw more men bulking in the door. One of them had shoved Jack forward, and now they were rushing in, right on his heels.

Shayne tried to keep his feet and untangle himself from the scared clerk, but he was taken too much by surprise. He caught a glimpse of a pistol, tightly clutched in a big hand, rising and falling and then thudding into the back of Jack's head. The clerk moaned and slumped to the floor.

Shayne thrust him aside and grabbed for his own gun. One of the men threw a punch that drove into Shayne's belly with tremendous force. The breath puffed out of his lungs.

Hands grabbed him then, bearing him backwards and down. More fists crashed into his body, and he felt his pistol torn out of its holster. There were three of the other men, all big and hard-faced, and with surprise on their side, Shayne was no match for them. They held him down, punching and kicking him until Shayne barely felt the pain anymore.

He was only semi-conscious when they lifted him from the floor and threw him into a straight-backed chair. Cords were whipped around him, tying him down securely. Shayne tried to speak, but the curses he was uttering didn't want to get past his thick tongue. His head was jerked back suddenly by fingers tangled in his coarse red hair, and his blurred vision was abruptly cut off entirely.

Shayne had enough of his wits still about him to know that he had been blindfolded. His captors stepped back, leaving him there bound to the chair, blinded and helpless. He shook his head groggily, trying to drive some of the cobwebs out, and then heard water running in his kitchen. He had a pretty good idea what would happen next, so he was braced for it when the cold water splashed in his face.

He shook the water off and waited for whatever else they had in mind. A moment later, he heard footsteps again, and somehow, he knew that someone else had entered the room.

The brief battle had been fought in silence, save for thuds and grunts. Now, for the first time since Shayne had gone to the door, someone spoke. It was the newcomer, and he was standing directly in front of Shayne.

"You might as well be reasonable about this, Shayne," he said.

"You've had a sample of what my men can do, and I promise you, they can be much rougher. Now, will you answer my questions?"

It was a voice Shayne had never heard before. He was sure of that. And it had a British accent

There was blood from a cut inside his mouth. Shayne spat it out and said harshly, "Hell, you haven't asked me anything yet."

"I asked if you will cooperate. If not, I'm afraid the beating will be much worse. If you tell me what I want to know, however, nothing else will happen to you or to that unfortunate clerk."

Shayne was silent for a long moment. If he had been alone, he might have told the unseen man what he could do with his questions. But there was Jack to consider, too. These men had used him to put Shayne off his guard, then struck him down viciously. Shayne didn't think they'd hesitate to kill him, if they thought it would get them what they wanted. He winced as a fresh wave of pain went through his body, then said, "What is it you want to know?"

"Very good. I want you to tell me what you know about *Forbidden Riches*."

Shayne frowned, touching the cut inside his cheek with his tongue. He said slowly, "I don't know what you're talking about."

What happened next didn't surprise him. A hard hand cracked across his face in a stinging slap. The interrogator said tightly, "That sort of answer will do no one any good, Shayne. I want to know what you've found out."

Shayne shook his head, feeling the burning imprint of the slap on his face. "I can't tell you what I don't know. And I never heard of any forbidden riches. What are they?"

There was silence for a few seconds. Then, the man said softly, "I did so hope that you would cooperate, Shayne. Now we'll be forced to hurt you even more. Nigel!"

Even though Shayne tried to prepare for it, the blow hurt. It was no slap this time, but a full-fledged punch. It jerked his head back and made skyrockets explode behind his blindfolded eyes.

"*Forbidden Riches*? Tell me the secret, Mr. Shayne!"

"Sorry. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Not as sorry as you will be"

For Shayne, the next half-hour took years to pass. The litany seemed never-ending. The questions, the denials, the blows and the pain

Finally, the man with the English accent said, "You're starting to convince me that you're telling the truth, Shayne. In that case, you'd best take a short vacation. You'll need it to . . . recuperate from your accident."

Shayne tried to frame an obscene retort about "accidents," but his

mouth would no longer work. He was hovering right on the edge of total unconsciousness, and when a fist slammed into his jaw again, he toppled over the black precipice. How far he fell, and how long it took him to get there, he didn't know, but he knew it took him and eternity to climb back up out of the abyss.

IT WAS LIGHT, STRIKING HIS EYES PAINFULLY, THAT TOLD him he was awake again, and no longer blindfolded. His face was lying against something textured and soft, and he finally realized that it was the carpet on his living room floor. A moan came to his ears, and he thought it originated within himself.

He was wrong. Shayne squinted his eyes against the light, got his hands underneath himself painfully, and heaved upward. His head came off the floor. Blinking, he looked around the apartment and saw Jack, lying several feet away and starting to stir as well. The clerk appeared to be unmarked. Shayne knew that the intruders must have left him alone after knocking him out in the initial charge into the apartment.

They hadn't left anything else alone, though. Shayne pushed himself up on his hands and knees and peered around at the devastation inside the apartment. It looked like a hurricane had hit it. The furniture was slashed and torn and toppled. Shayne could tell by looking that the intruders hadn't been solely looking for something. Part of the damage was just pure, wanton destruction.

The words of the leader came back to Shayne. He had been advised to take a vacation. That meant getting out of Miami. It meant leaving his cases behind.

And the only major case he was working on was the murder of Steve Hoover. Shayne was suddenly sure that there was much more to that case than appeared on the surface. He was going to find out what it was, too; it didn't surprise him that his attackers seemed to be foreigners, because if they knew anything at all about Mike Shayne, they would have known that a beating like this wasn't going to scare him off. It was only going to make him more determined to get to the bottom of the whole thing.

And it all seemed to be tied up with something called *Forbidden Riches*

IV

LUCY GASPED WHEN SHAYNE WALKED INTO THE OFFICE THE next morning.

"Michael! What in the world happened to you?"

Shayne grinned, even though it hurt his face. "Actually, I thought I looked pretty good this morning, Angel, after what I went through last night." He was right. His lean face was bruised, and he had bandaged a cut on his forehead, but overall, it was hard to tell that he had endured such a savage beating. He told Lucy what had happened, and she listened with a horrified expression on her lovely face.

When he was finished, she shook her head and said, "I know I should be used to trouble after all this time, Michael, but I just can't shrug these things off like you can. Is Jack all right?"

"He was scared and had a bump on the head, but other than that, he'll be fine," Shayne said. "I got a doctor up there to look at both of us."

"What about the police?"

Shayne grimaced. "I didn't want to call them, since they'll know this is connected with the Hoover case, but I didn't see any way around it. Jack would have kept quiet about it if I had asked him, but I didn't want him having to take any heat later."

"You're sure this ties in with that case?"

"It has to." Shayne leaned against the edge of her desk carefully, trying to ignore the protests of his battered form. He lit a cigarette and smoked silently for a moment, then went on, "I've been thinking about it all night. Those bruisers were British. At least the leader had a British accent and one of them was named Nigel. That definitely makes me want to have another talk with Pamela Boothe."

"You think she knows more about Hoover than she told you?"

"She's from England, too. It *could* be a coincidence that some British thugs bust into my apartment, beat me up, and tear the place apart. But I'm not going to bet anything on it."

"Do you think they were looking for something?"

"Maybe. But if they were, they didn't know what it looked like or where to look for it. I think if they had found something important to them, so much the better, but the primary goal was just to scare me off the case."

"It's not going to work, though, is it?"

Shayne laughed. "Not likely. See if you can locate Oldcomb for me. I want to ask him if he knows anything about something called *Forbidden Riches*."

"No need to locate him," Lucy said. "He called just before you came in. The police have agreed to let him go on using the back room of the bookstore as his studio. That's where he was calling from." A slight shudder ran through her. "I don't think I could work right there a few feet away from where my friend was killed, but I suppose writers are a pretty strange breed."

"You can say that again," Shayne muttered, straightening and heading for the inner office. "I'll give him a call and then head over there. I want to be able to see his face when I ask him about *Forbidden Riches*."

Cary Oldcomb answered on the first ring, and as soon as Shayne identified himself, said, "Have you found out anything, Mr. Shayne? I'm telling you, I don't know if I can work again until this thing is cleared up."

"I may have stumbled across something," Shayne said guardedly. "Is it all right if I come over there and discuss it with you?"

"Sure. I'm not getting anything accomplished this morning, anyway."

Shayne told him he would be there in fifteen minutes and then hung up. On his way out of the office, he paused and told Lucy, "I think I'll pay a visit to Pamela Boothe as soon as I've talked to Oldcomb, so I may be gone most of the morning."

"Just be careful, Michael."

He grinned at her. "They won't take me by surprise again, Angel. Next time, I'll have a score to settle."

IT WAS ANOTHER LOVELY DAY IN MIAMI, BUT SHAYNE'S mood was a lot darker than the weather as he entered Steve Hoover's bookstore. He wasn't surprised that the cops were letting Oldcomb resume his old routines; they would have already gotten all the evidence they could get out of the place. Oldcomb greeted him with a handshake and a look of concern.

"My God, what happened to you?" he asked when he saw Shayne's bruises. "Were you in a fight?"

"A one-sided one," Shayne answered. "Somebody thought I was better-informed than I really am. Maybe you can help with that situation. What's *Forbidden Riches*?"

"What?" Oldcomb's face was puzzled. "I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Shayne."

"Then you never heard of anything called *Forbidden Riches*?"

"Not that I can remember."

"And you don't remember Hoover speaking of it?"

Oldcomb reflected for a moment, then shook his head. "It doesn't ring any bells at all. Is it something connected with the murder?"

Shayne touched one of the bruises on his face gingerly and said, "It has something to do with the beating I took last night. And that has to be connected to Hoover's murder. Do you think Whitley might know?"

Oldcomb shrugged his bearlike shoulders. "I couldn't really say. You'll just have to ask him."

"I plan to." Shayne looked around at the multitude of books in the store. "What happened to that box of books Hoover got from Pamela Boothe?"

"Pamela, that was her name," Oldcomb said. "I remember now. They're on the floor there, behind you."

Shayne turned around and hefted the box, sitting it on the table that also held Oldcomb's typewriter. There was an idea playing around in his head, and it would only take a minute or two to check it out.

He unloaded the books from the box and made two stacks of them on the table, turning them so that the spines faced him. They were all in excellent condition for their age, with the titles still easily discernible on the leather bindings. Shayne ran a finger up one stack and down the other, then said, "Damn! It's not there."

"You were thinking maybe *Forbidden Riches* was the title of a book, weren't you?" Oldcomb asked. "Sounds like a good idea to me."

"Only it's not there," Shayne said. He was still looking at the stacks of books, one of which was several inches taller than the other one. Idly, he started counting them, and as he did, he felt his pulse start to quicken.

Pamela Boothe had said there were twenty books in the collection she had sold to Hoover, but here there were only . . .

" . . . eighteen, *nineteen!*" Shayne finished counting. "One of the books is missing."

He explained quickly to Oldcomb about what Pamela had told him, and the bearded writer said, "I don't think anybody's taken any books out of that box. I'm pretty sure the police didn't."

"I can think of one person who had the opportunity," Shayne said.

Oldcomb's face tightened. "You mean the killer?"

"That's exactly who I mean. *Forbidden Riches* could still be the title of a book, Oldcomb, a book that Steve Hoover got killed over."

"But if somebody wanted the book, Steve would have sold it to him. I doubt if he would have asked over forty or fifty bucks for it."

"Maybe whoever wanted the book didn't want anyone else knowing about it. Hoover didn't usually come back here in the evenings, did he?"

"Not usually, but —"

"Then someone could have broken in here to steal it and then panicked and killed Hoover when he showed up."

Oldcomb nodded. "It could have happened that way, all right. But what could be so important about an old book?"

"Maybe Pamela Boothe can tell us," Shayne said.

A FEW MINUTES LATER, HE WAS ON HIS WAY TO MIAMI

Beach and Pamela Boothe's condominium. In his pocket was a list he had made of the titles of the books in the collection that had originally been assembled by Pamela's great-grandfather, Sir John. With any luck, she would be able to tell him what the missing title was. If not, then there was always a chance that it would be written down with the others somewhere in the family papers. Pamela had talked like she had a lot of the family memorabilia.

She answered the doorbell wearing an expensive dress and a puzzled expression. "Why, Mr. Shayne," she said. "Whatever brings you around here again?"

"*Forbidden Riches*," Shayne said bluntly.

Pamela's frown deepened. "What? Mr. Shayne, you look positively dreadful. Were you in an accident?"

"You might say that. Could I come in?"

"Oh, of course. Please do. You must excuse my lack of manners. I'm just so surprised to see you this morning."

Shayne wondered if she was surprised because she knew about the attack on him the night before. He followed her into the living room and asked, "Have you ever heard of something, a book possibly, called *Forbidden Riches*?"

"I don't . . . Wait a moment, that title does seem familiar. It could be a book I've seen sometime, but I really couldn't say."

"Could it be one of the books you sold to Steve Hoover?"

"I suppose so." She looked at him intently. "This has something to do with his murder, hasn't it?"

"I think it does," Shayne said. "Is there any way you could check? Could there be a list of the books in your family records?"

"Lord, you might find anything in there. How would you like to look through them yourself?"

Shayne nodded. "If you're sure you wouldn't mind."

"Of course not. You just wait here, and I'll go get them. Would you like a cup of coffee or anything?"

"No thanks."

"Back in a moment."

It was closer to ten minutes before she returned, though, carrying a big cardboard box. Shayne could tell it was heavy, and that was confirmed as he took it from her. He put it down on a table and lifted one of the flaps of the lid.

Inside was one of the most jumbled stacks of dusty papers that Shayne had ever seen, reaching almost to the top of the box. He felt a pulse of discouragement, knowing that he might have to go all through it to find what he was looking for, if indeed it even existed.

Pamela saved him from that, though. She delved into the box with one slim arm and pulled out a thin, leather-bound book. "My great-

aunt's journal," she said, extending it toward Shayne. "I thought I remembered it being in here. She did an inventory of all of Sir John's collection, back around the turn of the century. He was her father, you know, and this was not long after he died, when the family was thinking about turning the mansion into a museum. You might find what you're looking for in there."

Shayne flipped through the pages of the old book, raising a small dust cloud. After several moments, a grin suddenly stretched his mouth. "Here it is," he said. "A list of the books in Sir John's collection."

Pamela peered at the book over Shayne's shoulder and pointed with a long finger. "And there it is! *Forbidden Riches*, just as you thought. But that's funny. The author of it isn't listed. The authors of all the others are."

Shayne frowned. She was right. For the life of him, though, he couldn't tell what, if anything, that might signify. He looked up at Pamela and said, "Do you mind if I take this box with me? I'd like to look through all of it. I'll take good care of it."

"Certainly, Mr. Shayne. Take all of it. Just mind you don't get sick from all the dust, and keep it as long as you need to."

"It shouldn't be long," Shayne said. "Somewhere in there might be something that would tell me about *Forbidden Riches*."

"Perhaps. But I don't envy you. Going through that lot is going to be a very boring job."

Shayne replaced the journal in the box and was picking the whole thing up again when the doorbell rang. Pamela said, "That'll be Malcolm," and went to open the door.

Malcolm Parker came into the living room with Pamela a moment later, smiled at Shayne, and said, "Here, what's all that? You didn't tell me you were moving, Pamela."

"I'm not. Mr. Shayne is taking that box full of old family papers to look through. He thinks it may help him solve the case he's working on."

"Are you sure that's wise, Pamela?" Parker laughed wryly. "There is no telling what sort of family skeletons are concealed in there, you know."

"I'm just looking for one particular skeleton," Shayne told them. "Do you know anything about a book called *Forbidden Riches*, Parker?"

"Can't say as I do. Is this connected with that dreadful murder you were asking Pamela about yesterday?"

"It is."

"Well, best of luck, Mr. Shayne. As for us, we're off to see more of

the sights your lovely state has to offer. Awfully nice of my cousin to guide me around while I'm here on vacation."

Pamela took his arm. "Glad to be of assistance, cousin."

Shayne said goodbye to both of them and then carried the box out to his Buick. He was going to head back to the office next, so that he and Lucy could get busy sorting through the dusty collection of Boothe family history. It would be boring, dirty work, but it could pay off.

There was something else he could do on the way back to the office, though. He stopped at a phone booth and got the directory out, making a quick list of all the rare book dealers in it. Several of them were located on his way back to the office, and it wouldn't hurt to stop off at them and make some inquiries about *Forbidden Riches*. It could well be that at least one of the dealers would have heard of it and could tell him something about it, if it was indeed a rare and valuable book.

A HALF-HOUR LATER, SHAYNE STILL THOUGHT IT WAS A good idea. It just hadn't paid any dividends. He had stopped at three bookshops, and so far, none of the proprietors had ever heard of a book titled *Forbidden Riches*. There was one more store on his list, and then it would be back to the office to start digging through the box of material he had gotten from Pamela.

Shayne turned into the parking lot of another small shopping center. much like the one in which Hoover had had his store, and piloted the Buick into an empty slot by the curb. There was a breezeway cut through the center of this complex, and one of the shops inside it, according to the address on Shayne's list, was Fabulous Universe Bookstore, specializing in rare horror, fantasy, and science fiction books. This one was a real longshot, Shayne knew, but at the same time, he had no idea just what type of book *Forbidden Riches* really was. It might fit into one of those categories.

He had just stepped into the shadows of the breezeway and was reaching for the door of the bookstore when the bullet whipped past his head.

Shayne threw himself to the side, grabbing for his gun. His shoulder hit the glass door of the store and knocked it open. He had a fleeting impression of gaudy posters on the windows and walls of the store, and of two young men standing behind a counter with shocked expressions on their faces. Then another slug punched a hole in the glass of the door, making Shayne hug the floor and sending the men behind the counter diving for cover.

The shots were coming from the other end of the breezeway. Shayne hadn't paid much attention to that area as he walked up, but he knew there was an alley back there, with palm trees growing thickly on the other side. Beyond the stand of trees was probably another street. Not

a bad place for an ambush. The front of the store was nearly all glass, and Shayne knew he would be a sitting duck if he stayed there. All he could do was try to draw the sniper's fire and hope for a chance to return it.

He came up in a crouch, grabbed a cardboard display of books with his free hand, and kicked the door open. Flinging the display out into the breezeway, Shayne was ready for the shot that it brought. He dove out amid the clutter of fallen books and snapped off three shots. He thought he had a pretty good idea of where the gunman was lurking among the trees. A bullet whined off the concrete-and-tile floor of the breezeway, sending dust into Shayne's eyes. He fired again and then rolled, stopping and firing once more. The other shots fell silent, and then the sound of running footsteps came to his ears.

Shayne didn't know if he had hit the sniper or not, but if not, then the shots had at least come close enough to scare him off. Standing up slowly, Shayne gazed grimly at the spot where the gunman had waited in ambush, then holstered his gun and started to brush himself off.

He looked through the open door of the bookstore and saw two faces peering wide-eyed over the counter. Both of the men were young. One of them wore a short, dark beard, while the other was thin-faced and clean-shaven. And they were both obviously scared to death by this sudden outburst of gunplay.

But then the bearded one summoned up his courage and turned to the other one to say cockily, "Well, Davis, what can I say? I told you traffic was going to pick up through here."

V

LUCY LOOKED UP AS SHAYNE CARRIED THE BOX INTO THE office and set it down on the desk. Puffs of dust rose from it again. Looking from Shayne to the box and then back to Shayne, Lucy asked, "What is it, Michael?"

"History, as assembled by Sir John Beechmuir Boothe and his family. I got this box of junk from Pamela Boothe. Maybe something in there will tell us more about *Forbidden Riches*."

Lucy sat forward. "Did you find out what it is?"

"It's a book of some sort, and it was part of the collection that Pamela sold to Steve Hoover. I think somebody was in Hoover's store stealing it when Hoover had the bad luck to stumble in on him."

"But you don't know what kind of book?"

Shayne shook his head and opened the lid of the box. "No, that's why I brought this stuff with me. I've been checking with some of the other book dealers, but none of them know anything about it." Shayne grimaced. "The last place I stopped, I got shot at and then charged an

outrageous price for some books I supposedly ruined."

"Shot at?" Lucy exclaimed.

"Yeah. That's one reason I think I'm on the right track. I hate to ask you to do this, Angel, because you're going to get dusty, but I could use some help in sorting through all of it."

Lucy stood up and said, "Why don't we take it into your office? There's more room on your desk."

Shayne hefted the box again, waved a hand to dispel some of the dust hovering around it, and said, "Get the door, will you?"

They put the box in the middle of Shayne's desk and started unloading it, each of them taking a handful of papers, looking through them quickly, and then setting them down to try again. The dust billowed around them, making Lucy sneeze and her eyes water. Shayne opened a window, but that didn't seem to help much.

There was a little bit of everything in the box, Shayne saw, from diaries and letters to newspaper clippings and pages from popular magazines of the period. There were old photos, too, and Shayne and Lucy got their first look at Sir John. He was a sturdy-looking man, with a full head of fair hair and a prominent handlebar moustache. His eyes were piercing and his jaw strong, and Shayne wasn't surprised by the facts of the man's life, as he gathered them from the memorabilia in the box.

Sir John had been, first and foremost, a soldier of the Queen, serving with distinction in India and the Far East, rising to the rank of Colonel. When not fighting to preserve the British Empire, he had also explored a great deal of uncharted territory, some of which no Englishman had ever seen before. To judge from the magazine and newspaper clippings, his exploits had made for good copy during the Victorian Era. His adventures as a soldier and explorer were not the only things discussed in the articles, though.

There was also much mention of treasure

SHAYNE FROWNED AS HE STUDIED THE AGE-YELLOWED pieces of paper. There were fewer facts and more speculation about this part of Sir John's career, but it was intimated that he had amassed a considerable fortune, most of it gleaned through his travels in the less-civilized sections of the world. There were stories about the fabulous wealth to be found in the lost temples that were hidden deep in the Asian jungles. Stories of idols with tremendous gems for eyes and statues made of solid gold.

"Have you run across anything about a treasure that Sir John was supposed to have?" Shayne asked Lucy.

"Several things," she answered, handing him more clippings. "It's just rumors, though, nothing confirmed."

Shayne scanned the clippings she gave him and then went back to sorting through the papers. A few minutes later, flipping through a stack of letters from Sir John's daughter to some friend of hers, another mention of the treasure again caught his eye.

He read the passage more closely, then said to Lucy, "Listen to this. It was written by Sir John's daughter, after his death. 'You would scarcely credit the harassment the family has received since Father's untimely demise. All sorts of people have been importuning us for an opportunity to search the mansion for Father's so-called treasure. They have the idea that he secreted a fortune somewhere within the house or grounds, but if so, he never mentioned its hiding place to myself or anyone else in the family. I can hardly believe that Father would have done such a thing without telling us, so that we could have the benefit of it after he was gone. Now that he is gone, of course, we shall never know, and we shall certainly not permit anyone to pry about the estate in some sort of misguided treasure hunt.'"

Shayne dropped the letter on the desk and looked at Lucy, who was staring at him intently. She breathed, "Michael, do you think that...."

"Sir John did leave a treasure hidden somewhere in the family mansion? Maybe. And I can only think of one connection that could have with an old book like *Forbidden Riches*."

"A treasure map hidden inside it!" Lucy exclaimed. "Or something else that would reveal the location of the treasure's hiding place."

"Exactly," Shayne agreed.

"But isn't this like something out of an old movie? I mean, hidden treasure, Michael?"

Shayne grinned. "It's hokey, all right, but we're talking about a possible fortune in jewels and gold, Angel. No matter how melodramatic the circumstances, people tend to get serious about things like that." The grin dropped off Shayne's face, to be replaced by a look of grim determination. "I think this may be what got Steve Hoover killed. Someone thought that book had the answer and was willing to kill to get it."

"Then it couldn't have been Pamela Boothe. She already had the book, and she wouldn't have sold it to Hoover."

"Unless she didn't know what she had until it was too late," Shayne pointed out. "I have an idea it was someone else, though, someone else connected with the Boothe family."

"Malcolm Parker?"

Shayne nodded. "He just bought the family mansion over in England. I got the impression that it had gotten away from the family over the years and that Parker was reclaiming it. If he found out about the treasure and thought it was still hidden there somewhere, he might have come over here to try to find out from Pamela where it was. He

must have heard a rumor or something about the book, saying that it might lead whoever had it to the hiding place." He inclined his head for a moment, rubbing his jaw. "I think my next move is definitely to talk to Malcolm Parker again."

"Do you know where to find him?"

Shaking his head, Shayne said, "He and Pamela were supposed to be going sight-seeing. They could be anywhere. I'll just have to keep calling over there until I get hold of someone." He pulled the phone over to him, pushing some of the papers aside, to try Pamela's number. After listening to it ring on the other end twenty times, he hung up.

"It's after noon," Lucy said. "Why don't we get something to eat?"

"Good idea." Shayne looked down at his hands, grimy from handling the old, dusty papers. "I think we'd better wash up first."

For all he knew, the meal he and Lucy shared at a restaurant not far from the office could have been either excellent or awful. His mind was full of the case, and his preoccupation effectively blunted his tastebuds. But his every instinct told him that he finally had a good handle on the case now, for the first time since he had started the investigation. Lucy knew from the look on his face what was going on in his head, and she wisely left him alone to go over the facts of the case.

By the time they got back to the office, Shayne was sure that his theory was right. He put in another call to Pamela Boothe's number, but again there was no answer. Cradling the phone, he swung around to face Lucy.

"I'm going over there," he told her. "There's not much else I can do until I get this checked out, and I might as well be waiting at Pamela's"

He started past her, but Lucy put a hand on his arm and stopped him. "If you're right, Michael, then Parker is a killer."

"I know," Shayne said bleakly. "That's why he'd better be the one to do the worrying, not me."

SHAYNE'S MIND WAS STILL CLICKING OVER RAPIDLY AS HE drove across Biscayne Bay to Miami Beach. His theory answered a lot of questions, but there were some things that were still not clear to him. For one thing, there were more people involved in this thing than just Malcolm Parker and Pamela Boothe. Four men, at least one of whom had a British accent, had attacked him in his apartment the night before. And then someone had taken a shot at him today, at a time when Parker was supposed to be with Pamela, out seeing the sights of southern Florida. On top of that, if Parker was indeed the one who had killed Hoover and stolen the book, why was he still hanging

around Miami? He should have been on the next plane back to England, to start searching for the treasure at the Boothe family mansion.

Yeah, there were still questions to answer, Shayne thought. But he would have been willing to bet that Malcolm Parker could answer them.

As he pulled up in front of the complex in which Pamela Boothe's condominium was located, he saw her car parked near her door. So she and Parker had returned. Shayne was hoping that the English cousin was still there, but if he wasn't Shayne was sure that Pamela could tell him which hotel he was staying at.

He leaned a finger on the doorbell, and the door opened almost immediately. Pamela stood there, a smile on her face, and said, "Well, have you gone through all that lot of papers already, Mr. Shayne? I expected that you would still be digging through them."

"I may have found something," Shayne said cautiously. "Do you mind if I come in?"

"Please do," Pamela said, stepping back to let Shayne in. "I'd like that very much."

There was something in her voice that made Shayne glance at her, and he thought he saw a hint of something in her face just for a second. Then the smiling mask came back down, and she led him on into the living room, chattering brightly.

Shayne interrupted her by saying, "Is your cousin around here, by any chance?"

The answer didn't come from Pamela. Malcolm Parker stepped into the room through another door and said, "Yes, I'm still here, old boy. What can I do for you?"

Shayne frowned when he saw what Parker was holding in his hand. It was a short, stout-looking rod, and at one end of it was a heavy metal ball studded with spikes. Parker saw that Shayne was looking at it and laughed.

"You must be wondering about this," he said, lifting it. "It's a mace. Hundreds of centuries old, you know. It came from the estate in England. Our ancestors accumulated quite a few ancient weapons and suits of armor. Fascinating armament, don't you think?"

"Yeah," Shayne grunted. "But not as fascinating as a certain old book that your great-grandfather had."

"Old book?" Pamela asked. "You're talking about the one you were asking about earlier?"

Shayne nodded. "That's right. I've got a theory about it. I think it had something to do with a treasure that Sir John is supposed to have hidden somewhere on his estate."

Pamela laughed, but there was a shaky sound to it. Shayne wasn't

watching her; his eye was on Parker. The Englishman was still smiling, almost fatuously, but he was also smacking the shaft of the mace into the palm of his other hand vigorously.

"Treasure, you say?" Parker asked. "What a lot of rubbish. I just bought the house, Mr. Shayne. Don't you think I would have heard something about a treasure being hidden there?"

"I think you did hear about it," Shayne said flatly. "I think you heard about it and also heard that *Forbidden Riches* was the key to finding it. That's why you came over here, to get the book from Pamela. But you were too late; she had already sold it, along with the others in the collection, to Steve Hoover. You were afraid to make an issue of it, since you didn't want your cousin wondering about your unusual interest in the book, so you went to Hoover's store the night before last and broke in, intending to steal it. Only Hoover came in unexpectedly and you lost your head. You killed him, didn't you, Parker?"

The Englishman was looking incredulous, but the expression was forced. The look of fear on Pamela's face told Shayne not only that he was right, but that she had already found out about what her cousin had done. He had thought when he came in that something was wrong, and now he was sure of it.

"That's the most ridiculous story I've ever heard," Parker said. "Why, you haven't a shred of proof—"

"But he knows," a new voice grated. "That's enough."

Shayne knew the voice as soon as he heard it. He had been blindfolded the last time he had heard the man speak. That voice had been asking questions, and then had come the pain

Spinning around, Shayne grabbed for his gun. He saw several figures surging into the living room from another entrance. Even as his pistol came free of its holster, Shayne knew that he was in a bad spot. Parker was behind him, with the mace.

He heard the rapid shuffle of feet and tried to duck to the side. The blow missed his head, but the ball on the end of the mace slammed into his shoulder. Pain crashed through him, and his entire right arm went numb, the gun slipping from fingers that could no longer feel it.

Shayne saw the fist coming at his face. He ducked it and ran right into another one. Rocked back, his whole right side hurting now from the blow of the mace, he tried to lash out at the men who were surrounding him now.

The odds were too much. Mike Shayne went down, and didn't come back up.

VI

SHAYNE WASN'T TIED UP WHEN HE CAME TO THIS TIME, BUT

he was sitting down. Reawakening was a lengthy process, but he had enough of his wits about him to keep as still as he could, with his breathing regular. There were voices speaking around him, and if they thought he was still unconscious, they might say enough to answer the rest of his questions.

He heard sobbing, too, and he wasn't surprised when Parker said, "Buck up, Pamela. No one's going to hurt you."

"Don't be too sure of that," another voice warned. This was the one that Shayne recognized, the leader of the four men who had beaten him the night before. "Unless we get what we want, there's no telling who'll get hurt."

"Here now, Brandon, there's no call for that kind of talk," Parker protested. "You're frightening Pamela."

"Get this straight, Parker," the man called Brandon snapped, "she'll have every reason to be frightened, and so will you, unless I see some results pretty damn quick. I've been patient with you and gone along with this crazy plan of yours, but I've about run out of patience, see?"

"Just take it easy," Parker said, and Shayne could hear the anxiety in his voice. "I would've got 'round to finding out. You had no call to come in here and ruin everything."

"Huh! No call except fifty thousand pounds that you owe me. I'm tired of waiting, Parker. Now you find out what you need to know, before I decide there's not any bloody treasure! I really wouldn't be happy then."

"All right, all right." Parker's tone of voice changed as he went on, "Come on now, Pamela. Just tell me how to read the damned code in this book."

"I told you earlier," Pamela replied brokenly, "I don't know what you're talking about! I never even read the blasted book!"

"But you must have known about the treasure —"

"No, never! I never heard a word about it. You knew my dad, how down to earth he was. He never would've placed any stock in any story about hidden treasure. And I was never interested in any of that dusty old stuff."

"Please, Pam, think! You must know something. The book's no good to us as it is. There has to be a trick, some way of deciphering what Sir John meant for it to tell us."

"How do you know Sir John meant it as a message?" Pamela asked.

"He wrote the bloody thing, didn't he? I showed you that letter I found in a cubbyhole of his old desk. He started a letter to his old sergeant-major and told him that he had written a book about the treasure he had found, the greatest treasure any man could ever want!

I don't blame him for deciding not to finish it and mail it; he didn't want anyone knowing about his secret. It was just luck that he didn't destroy it and that I found it, after growing up hearing all the legends on my side of the family. They all thought Sir John was a dotty old fool. But they were wrong!"

"Damn it all, Malcolm!" Pamela sobbed. "I thought you were a decent man. I never dreamed that you were mixed up with gamblers and gangsters!"

"Call me what you will, Miss," Brandon said coolly. "All I know is that I want the money your cousin owes me. If he couldn't pay, he shouldn't have played."

"I can pay," Parker promised. "I can pay you what I owe you, plus all the interest, plus a share in the treasure . . . as soon as I figure out how to find it."

"It had better be soon; I don't like operating on this side of the pond. I was willing to try to get Shayne there out of the way. We didn't need him mucking about and trying to find out who killed that bookshop owner. And I didn't mind sending one of the boys after him today to try to get that box of stuff back from him, even though it meant shooting. But you heard the big bastard. He hasn't got the faintest notion how to find the treasure. He was still trying to track down that stupid book."

"It's not stupid!" Parker exclaimed. "I'm sure it's the key."

"Well, I'm not so sure there is a treasure anymore. And if there's not, that means you're going to have to pay me out of your hide, Parker."

THERE WAS AN UNEASY SILENCE, THEN PARKER SAID, "Come on, Pam. You've crossed me at every turn, first selling those books just before I got over here, then giving Shayne that box of papers, when you wouldn't give them to me, no matter how much I hinted."

"You hint too much," Brandon put in. "You've got to just go ahead and take what you need in this world."

"I . . . I honestly don't understand any of this," Pamela said. "Please, Malcolm, tell these awful men to go away. Then we can talk about Sir John."

"Forget it, Miss," Brandon told her, before Parker could say anything. "Anything you have to tell Parker, you can tell us."

"But I've told you and told you —"

Shayne didn't know what he did to give it away, but a new voice, belonging probably to one of Brandon's men, said suddenly, "I think this big cobber's awake now, boss."

"He is, is he?" Brandon said. "About time, we didn't hit him that hard." Shayne heard footsteps in front of him, but he still kept his eyes

closed. Brandon said, "Forget it, Shayne. Playing dead won't help you."

A hand cracked into Shayne's face in a ringing slap. His head jerked to the side, with bells ringing inside his brain, but a quick shake quieted them down. There was no point in subterfuge now. He opened his eyes and glared up at Brandon.

The English gangster was a medium-sized man with sandy hair, a receding hairline, and a thick moustache. Ironically, he looked a little bit like the picture of Sir John that Shayne had seen. Shayne said dryly, "You didn't have to come all the way from England to do that."

Brandon snorted. "The American sense of humor, flip in the face of death. And you are facing death, Shayne. I'm tired of playing games. I want my money, and I want to go home." He turned away from Shayne and faced Parker again. "I mean that, Parker. I want to go home. That's why I was waiting here for you and your cousin this afternoon. It was time for some direct action."

"Shooting at me isn't direct enough for you?" Shayne asked.

Brandon glanced back at him. "That was an attempt to get the box of material given you by Miss Boothe. Not that it would have done us any good, we now know. If the secret of finding the treasure had been in there, you wouldn't have come back to ask Parker about the book. You would have *known*. Still, when he called and asked us to get the box from you, I saw no harm in complying."

"Except that you didn't get the box."

Brandon shrugged. "As I said, it didn't really matter." He reached into a pocket of his suit and came out with a clasp knife. Snapping it open, he held up the long, wicked-looking blade. "I believe some persuading must be done. You know nothing of value to us, Shayne, so we'll begin with you. Perhaps Miss Boothe's memory will improve after I've done a bit of carving and forced her to watch."

Pamela let out a stifled scream. "You can't —"

"I can and will," Brandon said coldly. "Parker's already killed once to try to get that treasure. I'm not going to give up yet, either." A sudden smile crossed Brandon's florid face. "Perhaps Parker should do this job, too. He's proven to be handy with a knife."

Parker paled and took a step backwards. "That other thing happened so fast . . . I want no part of any more violence, Brandon . . ."

SHAYNE HAD BEEN LOOKING AROUND EVER SINCE HE opened his eyes, trying to size up the situation. He was sitting in a deep armchair in Pamela's living room. Pamela was in another chair, about ten feet away, and grouped around both of them in a loose half-circle were Parker, Brandon, and Brandon's three goons. Parker was standing near Pamela's chair, and Brandon was close to Shayne's.

Shayne already knew that his gun was gone; he had been aware of that almost as soon as he woke up. He had no doubt that Brandon's men were armed, but no guns were in evidence at the moment. Brandon had the knife, of course, but the only other weapon in sight was the mace, which was lying on a table just behind Brandon.

Shayne was tired, and his aches and pains from the trouble of the last two days were plentiful. But he knew that he would have to do something sooner or later. When they were through here, whether or not they found out what they wanted to know, Brandon and Parker would have to kill him. Pamela would probably stay alive until they got what they were looking for or else gave up on it, but then she would have to go, too.

Brandon was still holding the knife. Parker reached behind him and picked up something from the mantle of the fireplace. Shayne saw that it was a book, bound in dark leather with gilt stitching, and he knew he was looking at the mysterious volume that had gotten Steve Hoover killed.

Parker held it out toward Pamela, an imploring look on his face as he pleaded, "At least look at it, Pamela. Maybe something will come back to you if you do. You had the bloody thing for years, you must know its secret."

She shook her head, tears running down her cheeks. "I'm sorry, Malcolm. I just don't know . . . I can't —"

Brandon cursed bitterly. "I've had enough, I tell you!" He took a step toward Parker, extending the knife toward him. "Take this and start cutting on Shayne. That'll get results."

Shayne wasn't going to wait any longer.

Brandon had taken his eyes off him, and he was between his men and Shayne, too. Shayne's right leg shot out and up in a vicious kick as his hands and arms levered himself up out of the chair.

His big foot slammed into Brandon's groin, and the Englishman let out a howl of pain. Shayne saw the other men grabbing for guns, but then his shoulder was barreling into Brandon, sending him sprawling against his men.

Shayne's arm swept out. His fingers closed over the haft of the mace. He whirled, using all of his strength to whip the heavy, ancient weapon around. The ball on the end of it thudded into the skull of one of Brandon's men with a sickening crunch.

Shayne ignored the carnage caused by the mace and leaped forward, swung it again. A gun blasted, almost right in his face, but if he was hit, he didn't feel it. The mace hit home again, and another man dropped, this time with a shattered collarbone.

Brandon was screaming angrily. Shayne saw the flicker of steel and

flung his arm up. The knife bit into his sleeve and raked his skin. Shayne jabbed with the mace, driving it into Brandon's stomach. The last of Brandon's three henchmen was trying to get a clear shot past his employer, and Shayne didn't want that. He shoved Brandon away and dove to the side.

A slug chewed the air next to his head, but that was the only chance the man got. Shayne was too close now. He lashed out with the mace for the third time. It caught the man in the jaw. Most of the force of the blow missed, but there was enough to break the bone and send the man to the floor, moaning.

Pamela was screaming, but Shayne glanced at her and saw that she was all right, just scared out of her wits. Brandon was recovering now, coming at Shayne with the knife held low, ready to slash up and disembowel him. Shayne's head was pounding with the effort he had already put into the fight, and the mace, heavy as it was, felt even heavier.

"You're going to take a long time dying, you bastard," Brandon hissed. He fainted once, twice, with the knife, but Shayne didn't bite. Then the blade lunged toward Shayne, for real this time, and Shayne barely got the mace around to parry the blow.

He had been lucky, damned lucky, so far, and he knew it. They hadn't expected him to be able to put up this much of a fight, and the mace was a brutally efficient weapon in close quarters like this. But if this fight lasted very long, there was only one way it could end.

And there would still be Parker to deal with, too . . .

BRANDON CHARGED AGAIN, AND AGAIN SHAYNE PARRIED the thrust, but this time the Englishman drew blood again, slicing the blade across Shayne's forearm. That was just going to weaken him more, as the blood oozed crimson through his sleeve.

A cruel grin was stretching Brandon's mouth now. He knew that Shayne was weakening, knew that a few more exchanges would see Shayne failing to block a lunge or a slash, and then it would be all over. He gritted his teeth and went forward to make the kill.

His foot slipped in the blood of one of his own men.

Shayne used the opportunity. The mace snapped around, catching Brandon on the wrist and flicking the knife away. Brandon's face was astonished at the sudden turn of luck, and he didn't even have time to duck as Shayne's other hand shot toward him.

It felt good, the impact as Shayne's fist crashed into Brandon's face. It rippled all the way up Shayne's arm, and as the British gangster went down like a felled tree, Shayne knew he would stay down. Brandon was alive, which was more than could be said for one of his

men, but he was out cold and would stay that way for a while.

Which left Parker.

Shayne turned slowly. His mouth twitched in a grimace at what he saw. Parker had picked up one of the fallen guns and had it trained on Shayne now.

"Drop the mace," Parker commanded. "I'll shoot, Shayne. I've already killed once, like Brandon said, and I'll do it again if I have to."

Pamela was still sitting in the chair where she had been ever since Shayne recovered consciousness. She had stopped screaming now, and she said shakily, "Someone must have heard, Malcolm. The police will be coming. Don't make things any worse."

"Brandon would have killed me if I didn't find the treasure to pay him," Parker said. "How could things get any worse than that? I won't have to worry about him now, though. You've seen to that, Shayne. Now, the treasure can be all mine."

"You're crazy," Shayne said bleakly. "You'd never make it out of the country now, let alone back to England. Besides, it's all a wild goose chase, Parker. You don't even know for sure there is a treasure."

"There is!" Parker cried. "There has to be. Sir John even wrote a book about it!"

"He wrote a book about something. Judging from what you've said, it's not about treasure."

"He was just being careful. He used a code —"

"Put the gun down, Parker," Shayne said softly. "There's only about ten feet between us, and that's a .32. You'd have to make a hell of a shot to put me down right away. I think I'd get one good lick in with this mace, and that's all it would take. Look at that guy behind me, the first one who got hit. Look at what the mace did to his skull. It can do the same thing to yours. Just like an eggshell . . ."

There was silence in the room for a long moment. And then there was the sound of the gun hitting the floor.

Shayne started breathing again. He stepped forward and picked the gun up, dropping the mace. Parker put his hands over his face and leaned against the fireplace, his shoulders shaking as he cried silently. Shayne reached over and squeezed Pamela's shoulder tightly for a moment. It was over. He could hear sirens now, and he knew that Will Gentry's men would be arriving soon to take charge.

Until then . . . The book was lying on the floor where Parker had dropped it when the trouble started. Shayne stopped and picked it up, flipping it open one-handed. It was printed on heavy paper, made with care and bound to last. His eyes scanned the print inside for a moment, and then a smile started to spread over his face. The smile

got wider as he read on.

And then he was laughing

"SO THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED," HE TOLD CARY OLDComb later. He was back in his office, fortified by several drinks and Lucy's solicitous presence.

Oldcomb shook his head. "So it wasn't anything to do with Steve," he said. "It was just because he happened to buy those books."

"And because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time," Shayne added. "For that matter, if Pamela Boothe hadn't been so disinterested in the past and her family history, she probably never would have sold the books in the first place."

"Of all the lousy luck," Oldcomb muttered.

"Yeah." Shayne swallowed more cognac and then put the glass back on the desk. "At least the people responsible for his death are behind bars now." His eyes got far away for a second. "I almost wish Parker had tried to shoot me"

Oldcomb reached out and picked up the book that was lying beside the glass on Shayne's desk. "And this is what started it," he said. "Do you think there really is a treasure?"

Shayne shrugged. "Who can say? Personally, after looking at that book, I doubt it. I think Sir John was talking about something else besides material wealth in that letter fragment that Parker found. He was writing about something completely different in that book."

"And I can see why his daughter didn't list his name as the author in that inventory she made," Lucy put in, a touch of disapproval in her voice.

"Do you mind if I look at it?" Oldcomb asked.

"As far as I'm concerned, you can have it," Shayne said. "Pamela Boothe doesn't want it, and Parker made a full confession, so the cops don't particularly need it." Shayne grinned suddenly. "What the hell, you're a writer. Maybe you can get some ideas out of it."

Oldcomb opened the book, read a passage to himself, and then started flipping through it rapidly, stopping every little bit to read another paragraph or two. His eyes widened behind his glasses, and when he looked up at Shayne, there was astonishment on his bearded face.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said. "It's a dirty book!"

NEXT MONTH

Mike Shayne returns in another thrilling adventure!

Don't miss it!

The old man had been blown apart with a booby trap meant for Lansing. The CID investigator had to find the killer — before the killer found him!

Kill Lansing

by W. L. Fieldhouse

GENERAL CLAYTON, THE COMMANDER OF THE CRIMINAL Investigation Department of USAEUR returned the major's salute. He noticed an unaccustomed hardness in Clifford Lansing's lean face. The gray at Lansing's temples seemed to have claimed some more of his close-cropped brown hair within the last twenty four hours. A muscular blond man, dressed in a civilian suit, sat in one of the leather arm chairs in front of Clayton's desk.

"Please be seated, Major," the general urged. "Of course, you remember *Herr* Dieter."

"Yes, sir," Lansing replied, lowering his tall, lean body into the vacant chair. "Karl and I worked together on my last homicide investigation."

Dieter was an agent from the *Bundesnachrichtendienst*. The BND is West Germany's equivalent of the American CIA and FBI rolled into one.

Clayton stared down at the ink blotter on his desk. "I've notified Nick Prasinos' family."

"That must not have been easy, General," Lansing said sincerely.

"When you learned what happened this morning, it must have been quite a jolt too," Clayton commented.

"Well, to discover a poor old man, who had the misfortune of working in this building as a janitor, had opened the door of my office to clean it and was promptly splattered all over the corridor . . ." the major stopped, aware his voice was sharp. "Yes, sir. It was a jolt."

"No one can blame you for being upset, Cliff," the general said. Referring to Lansing by his first name was a signal that the conversation would be relatively informal.

"Doctor Carson has begun the autopsy," Lansing sighed. "Of course, the cause of death is rather obvious in this case: Two blasts of buckshot at close range."

"Does the lab have anything yet?" Dieter inquired.

"The weapon is a twelve gauge shotgun," the major answered, his voice tired. "Over-under barrels, the type favored by Europeans for pheasant hunting and shooting skeet. The barrels had been cut down and part of the stock was removed. They're checking the serial numbers, but if the gun is a blackmarket piece, that won't help very much. The weapon was mounted to my desk with the muzzles pointed at the entrance of the office. Wires were rigged to the trigger to discharge the shotgun when the door opened. No fingerprints."

"Not much to go on," Clayton remarked. He forced a weak smile.

"But we've solved murders with far less information. At least you have, Cliff."

"We know one thing," Lansing said softly. "Whoever set up that booby-trap didn't intend to kill an old Greek immigrant who mopped floors as a civilian employee at CID headquarters. Thank God Wendy wasn't the victim." He referred to his personal secretary, the beautiful and efficient Specialist 5th Class Wendy Davis.

"I agree," Clayton nodded. "The killer wanted you, Cliff. That's why I asked *Herr* Dieter to come here."

"We ruffled a lot of feathers with the investigation of Klaus Werner's murder at Wayne Barracks," the German National said in flawless English as he tapped a cigarette on a thumbnail. "In the process of catching the killer, you uncovered a lot of dirt about two other American soldiers. They may not be very happy that you ruined their careers."

"Frankly, Cliff," the general sighed. "Since you're such a damn fine homicide investigator, the best in USAEUR if not the world, I'm afraid the list of possible suspects is enormous."

"I'd think most of the people who'd want revenge for my professional actions are in prison," Lansing said. "At least they should be."

"Everyone you've *arrested* is still behind bars," Clayton confirmed. "However, during your investigations, you've rubbed some pretty dangerous people and organizations the wrong way. On two occasions you've foiled the plans of Soviet KGB agents. You've ruined several narcotics rackets and at least one major blackmarket operation. Twice you've clashed with the Corsican syndicate. Then there were those Iranian terrorists several months ago. Why, last year you even had a

run in with some sort of Japanese gangsters."

"The *yakuza*," Lansing nodded. "We can rule them out. The little plot their man was involved with in Einhorndorf was a risky venture in the first place and I can't imagine them sending an assassin from the Orient to get revenge for the loss of one man."

"I don't think we're dealing with the KGB either," Karl Dieter added. "The Russian intelligence network doesn't use crude booby traps such as a trap-gun. Cyanide gas and plastic explosives are more their style."

"That still leaves a great number of suspects," Clayton frowned.

"And one we have not mentioned," Dieter said, lighting the cigarette. "Your associate, Cliff. Major Conglose."

"Conglose?" Lansing raised an eyebrow with surprise.

LANSING HAD KNOWN THE ABRASIVE, AMBITIOUS MAJOR FOR more than two years. Although in charge of narcotics and blackmarket investigations, Conglose had frequently meddled in Lansing's assignments. Generally he'd only been an annoyance, but Conglose's interference in the last homicide investigation had nearly caused a total disaster.

"Major Conglose is currently restricted to quarters until I can decide how serious his punishment will be," the general explained, the tone of his voice revealing his displeasure with the narcotics investigator. "As you know, *Herr* Dieter, Conglose's incompetent behavior nearly allowed Klaus Werner's murderer to get away."

"It was the first serious mistake he's made," Lansing said, surprising himself by coming to Conglose's defense. "He thought he knew who the killer was when he told the MPs to release the other two suspects."

"It wasn't even *his* investigation, and even if it had been, Conglose had no business telling the military police to let a pair of suspected murderers go free," Clayton insisted. "His carelessness nearly got you killed, Cliff!"

"I remember," the major assured him. "But it wasn't intentional on Conglose's part."

"If it had been, he'd be facing a court martial by now," the general stated firmly. "He *still* might. At the very least, he'll get an official reprimand. This time his bumbling behavior is going on his record."

"This restriction to quarters," Dieter began. "It does not mean Conglose is locked in a room and guarded, correct?"

"No," Clayton replied. "An officer in the United States Army is still fairly mobile under such conditions. He's not formally under arrest, so he isn't confined or guarded. He is required to keep us informed of his

activities and to tell us his whereabouts if he leaves his apartment."

"Not much of a restriction," the BND agent mused. "The major could literally go anywhere unnoticed by simply providing you with false information." Dieter blew a smoke ring at the ceiling. "If he put that shotgun in Cliff's office, I doubt if he'd tell you the truth."

"Conglose has his share of undesirable traits and I realize he's never liked me very much," Lansing admitted. "But I can't believe he's capable of murder."

"He's ambitious, Cliff," the general said. "You know that better than I since he's tried to throw you to the wolves on more than one occasion when he thought it would help his career."

"He wants lieutenant colonel," Lansing said.

"Well, that's one promotion he can just forget about," Clayton growled. "He'll be lucky to keep his current rank."

"Something of a bitter disappointment for Major Conglose," the German commented. "His career is his life. He's ambitious and his ambitions have been ruined. He may even be court martialed and discharged from the military."

"*Herr* Dieter has a point, Cliff," Clayton declared. "I wouldn't have thought Conglose was capable of murder either, but then I didn't think he was arrogant enough to pull this last stunt. Murderers are an arrogant breed. They have to be to feel their desires justify the taking of another person's life."

"Let's not condemn him before we have some more facts," Lansing said. "I suppose Conglose is as good a place for me to start my investigation as any, however."

"Maybe somebody else should handle this case," Clayton suggested.

I thought you had confidence in my ability, sir."

"You've never failed to solve a homicide investigation But this time you are the intended victim."

"I'd like this case, General."

"You should keep a low profile until we've caught the killer. Perhaps leave the country for a while."

"What if somebody else steps into another lethal booby trap left for me, sir?"

"Clifford might be right," Dieter said. "The killer may expose himself if he tries again and we'll be there to catch him."

"You're suggesting I allow one of my top officers to serve as *bait* for an unknown assassin?" Clayton's bushy white eyebrows met in a scowl. "Absolutely not!"

"It might work, sir," Lansing said. "Besides, I'd rather handle the investigation than sit on my butt and wonder how it's going."

"I don't like this idea," the general muttered.

"I don't like the fact an old man got killed because of me," the major said.

"Well, it wasn't your fault, Cliff. You shouldn't blame yourself for what happened."

"I don't," Lansing assured him, his voice flat and as cold as the inscription on a headstone. "I blame the son of a bitch who killed Nick Prasinos and I intend to find him."

"I'll have the MPs assign you a couple of men."

"I'd rather not have them, sir," the homicide investigator told Clayton. "They'd just be two more people who might catch a bullet or a load of buckshot meant for me. I only want to worry about myself if any shooting occurs."

"Damn it, Major!" the general snapped. "You should have some protection."

"I intend to, sir," Lansing replied. "A forty-five caliber bodyguard, just as soon as I can draw it from the arms room."

MAJOR THADDEUS CONGLOSE WAS A SHORT ROUND FACED man with a nearly bald head. His thick glasses gave him the appearance of a middle-aged clerk, something Conglose fully realized and resented. He looked up from his immaculately neat desk when he heard a knock at the door. Major Lansing entered.

"What do you want?" Conglose asked sourly.

Lansing glanced about his fellow officer's room. He'd only been in that office on four occasions in the last two years. The artillery red carpet was clean and well-cared for. The furniture seemed to be in excellent condition and there was no dust on the filing cabinets or window sill. Conglose kept an admirably clean and neat office, just as his uniform always appeared to be neatly pressed, brass shined, scant campaign ribbons displayed over the breast pockets and shoes spit-shined.

Lansing was a career officer, but his life revolved around his work as a homicide investigator, a profession he'd adopted as a civilian police detective in Detroit before Vietnam drew him into the service. For Conglose, however, being an officer in the United States Army was more important than his duties as a CID investigator. Being *part* of the military was his primary function in life.

"I'd like to talk to you, Major," Lansing explained.

"Go ahead," Conglose replied bitterly. "I've got plenty of time. You see I'm still required to come to work and I'm officially still in charge of narcotics and blackmarket investigations, despite the fact I'm under detention. Of course, General Clayton has assigned everything to other

officers. All the work is going directly to those make-believe civilians. The long-haired types that don't wear uniforms and like to play James Bond."

Lansing smiled thinly. One thing he and Conglose had in common was that both men preferred to handle their investigations as soldiers, dressed in full military uniform without the use of "civilian disguises." Army personnel always spotted "El Cid" when one went undercover anyway.

"You heard about what happened in my office today?" Lansing asked.

Conglose nodded. "I'm sorry about old Nick. They seem to think that shotgun was meant for you."

"That seems likely," Lansing sighed. There was no tactful way to question Conglose without letting him know he was a suspect. "Can you account for your actions at that time, Major?"

The eyes behind those thick lenses expanded. "Are you suggesting I may have set that trap in your office?"

"All possibilities have to be considered in a homicide investigation," Lansing said flatly. "Even the unlikely ones."

"Oh, really?" Conglose sneered. "Just business as usual? I'm not supposed to be offended because there's nothing personal involved, right?"

LANSING NEARLY TOLD HIM THAT IT HAD BEEN GENERAL Clayton and Karl Dieter who'd proposed Conglose as a possible suspect. Yet, he'd asked to be in charge of his own case and that meant he was responsible for any unpleasantness involved. He'd had an opportunity to back out and he'd refused. Besides, to tell Conglose the general's suspicions would be a greater blow to the little major than to allow him to think Lansing was the villain.

"Whoever set that shotgun in my office must be familiar with CID headquarters," he said.

"So I had the opportunity and the knowledge," Conglose snapped. "And you probably feel I have a motive too."

"Don't you blame me for your present problems?" Lansing asked, staring into the other man's eyes.

"It is your fault, Lansing, and we both know it! Your insistence upon conducting every investigation like a maverick isn't proper military procedure. You try to grand slam everytime. You bask in the glory of solving every baffling case single-handed. General Clayton might be impressed by your behavior and *The Stars and Stripes* and *The Overseas Weekly* can write stories about you as if you were some sort of

uniformed Sherlock Holmes, but I know what you really are, Lansing!"

"What's that, Major?"

"A rash, egotistical individualist! You've never really been part of the team, part of the military. That's why you'd love an excuse to get rid of me. I can see right through you, and you know it!"

"Is that why you've made a part-time profession of meddling in my investigations?" Lansing asked, an edge creeping into his voice.

"*Meddling?*" Conglose scoffed. "I've tried to keep you from playing lone-wolf and fouling up your investigations! I've been concerned with the good of the Army, not personal ambitions and glory hunting!"

"I've always managed to solve any case I've been assigned, sir," the homicide investigator commented. "And any man who's a career officer in the service has ambition and a desire for higher rank — including you."

"And I would have made lieutenant colonel if you hadn't come along!" Conglose insisted. "Since I'm a suspect, you must have already pulled my two-o-one file from the personnel records at Ansbach. Read it! I wasn't in Vietnam or an Airborne Ranger, like you; and I don't have all your combat decorations, but I went to a fine military academy — not just Officers' Candidate School. I graduated third in my class, Lansing. *Third!* I was an officer when you were still wearing chevrons. I still outrank you, despite everything that's happened. I still have seniority!"

"No one is denying that, sir."

"Now my career is ruined," Conglose said, almost whispering. "I've never had a mark on my record — no court martials, no Article Fifteens, not even an official reprimand. I've received letters of commendation from every commander I've served under in my twenty-two years in the military. But now there's going to be a blemish on my perfect military record. I'll probably be asked to resign my commission for the good of the service. You know what that means. Get the hell out of the Army or they'll discharge you out!"

"It may not come to that."

"It will as long as you're the fair-haired boy of General Clayton," Conglose hissed. "*You've done this to me, Lansing!*"

Lansing sighed. "Do you enjoy being a suspect in a murder case, Major? You aren't doing a very good job at dismissing any suspicions."

"You know it's absurd to think I put that gun in your office. It wouldn't surprise me if you did it yourself for more publicity."

Lansing's expression hardened. "Major Conglose," he began, ice forming on his words. "An old man was killed by that booby trap and I feel pretty rotten about that," he turned toward the door. "So I'd

better leave before I decide to haul you out from behind that desk and knock your teeth out for that remark."

"Lansing!" Conglose exclaimed, rising from his chair. "Despite what I think of you personally and the kind of officer you are, I still remember that two years ago you caught the man who killed a close friend of mine and when my wife, Beverly, was accused of murder at Christmastime, you cleared her. Those are two motives I have *not* to kill you, no matter what you've done to me professionally."

"I'll bear that in mind," Lansing assured him. "Maybe instead of trying to see through me, you should take a closer look at yourself sometime."

LANSING ENTERED HIS OFFICE TO DISCOVER KARL DIETER examining the buckshot imbedded in the doorway and wall. SP5 Wendy Davis was busy reading 201 files and records from former homicide investigations.

"A close pattern," the German remarked. "But not double-O-buck."

"The killer used number-four-shot," Lansing replied. "What brings you here, Karl?"

Dieter smiled. "Last time you helped the BND find a killer. Maybe this time, we can help you."

"Perhaps you can," the investigator agreed.

"Did you learn anything from Conglose?"

"Only that he's far more bitter and filled with resentment than I'd imagined," Lansing sighed.

"Sir?" Wendy raised her lovely head. "I've gone through all your old cases and drawn two-o-one files on every killer you arrested who was stationed in USAEUR."

"That covers United States Army personnel," Dieter said. "But you've also caught a number of civilian killers. The BND will contact police departments where you've held investigations in the past. I'll need a list of the cities and towns."

"Nuremburg, Frankfurt, Bonn and Einhornrdorf," Lansing replied. "I also handled investigations in Zirndorf and Furth, but the killers were military personnel in those cases."

"We'll check them anyway," the German said.

"I've also got some material on USAEUR personnel who might have reason to try to kill you, sir," Wendy said.

"Oh? Anybody special?" Lansing asked.

"Well, besides Major Conglose," she began, her tone revealing that she also considered the man an unlikely suspect. "I've found a few others. For example, there's Master Sergeant George Potter."

"Snyder Barracks," Lansing nodded. "The Stowers killing."

"Potter was a suspect, but his wife turned out to be the killer."

"I remember," the investigator said. Peggy Potter had been the only murderer he'd *almost* been sorry to catch. "As I recall, they weren't exactly a blissful couple. Their marriage was heading for the rocks even before she was sent to prison."

"They're divorced now, sir," Wendy supplied. "The sergeant is currently stationed at Munson Barracks."

"I don't think Potter has a strong enough motive and he's a hothead, not the sort to wait almost two years to get revenge."

"What about Captain Milton Addams and Staff Sergeant Paul Nimson?" Dieter inquired.

"Sergeant Nimson has been arrested and is currently awaiting his court martial for narcotics charges," Lansing replied. "There's already been an investigation into Captain Addam's possible involvement with the Baader Meinhof terrorists."

"They're a mean bunch," Wendy commented.

"Yes," Lansing agreed. "But Addams has been cleared of any intentional connection with them. Even if the committee goofed and Addams is associated with the terrorists, the Baader boys would have nothing to gain by killing me."

"Speaking of terrorists," Wendy said. "What about the Iranians? They probably feel they have a reason to want you dead."

"The militant followers of Khomeini haven't been active in West Germany since that incident in Bonn," Dieter assured them. "The GSG-Nine anti-terrorist division has seen to that."

"That doesn't mean they aren't still around and seeking revenge," Wendy insisted.

"We won't dismiss them," Lansing said. "Karl, what does the BND know about the Corsican syndicate's operations in Bavaria?"

"Not as much as we should and more than I can mention without getting permission to discuss it from my superiors," the German answered. "Do you think the *Union de Corse* could be responsible?"

"A trap gun seems more their style than the KGB or the Iranians. In the United States, the police can usually tell you the name, address and general activities of every major league gangster in their area. The only thing they don't have in most cases, is enough evidence to arrest the hood."

"I'm afraid the situation is much the same in Europe," Dieter sighed. "Probably the entire world."

"Is there a Corsican version of a Mafia *don* in Bavaria?"

"There might be," the BND man said cautiously. "That's something I'll have to talk to my headquarters about before I can say more."

"Find out as much as you can," Lansing urged. "Sometimes the best way to deal with syndicate goons is to go to the head man for answers."

"That can also be dangerous."

"So is being a target for an unknown assassin," Lansing replied dryly.

"Sir, I think you'd better see this." Wendy handed him a report form. "Notice the location of Sergeant Gordon's father."

Lansing nodded grimly. "James A. Gordon is a top level executive for the Grand-Life Insurance Company. He's currently assigned as the vice president of their European branch. His office is in downtown Nuremburg."

"Why is this man a suspect?" Dieter asked with surprise.

"Because he's the father of Sergeant Allen Gordon," Lansing replied. "The man I shot and killed last Christmas Eve."

THE WHITE VOLKSWAGEN PULLED INTO AN ALLEY BESIDE the *Bon Appetite*, an expensive French restaurant in Nuremburg. Lansing parked the diminutive car and turned to Karl Dieter in the seat beside him.

"The BND is sure about this guy?"

Dieter nodded. "Maurice Labou is the chief of all *Union de Corse* operations in Southern Germany. He's probably the number three man in the syndicate here in this country, and he's believed to be about number nineteen among the big fish of the entire Corsican network — and that's really higher ranking than it sounds since most of the top men are in France."

"But you can't pin anything on him," Lansing said, not really asking a question.

"We know he's been involved in every Corsican related activity in Bavaria for the last five years, but Labou is clever. He doesn't discuss his true business on the telephone — both the BND and the Nuremburg police have put enough wire taps on it to know that. The *Bon Appetite* is a legitimate business and he has all his books in order, pays his taxes and follows all the other rules to keep out of trouble. Actually, the restaurant makes a lucrative profit. Of course, Labou also has a Swiss bank account with a fortune in whatever currency you care to name. He's been responsible for at least four murders, fifteen loan shark operations, several blackmarket rings, including a couple that dealt in illegal arms sales to political fanatics of every possible persuasion, and all of the Corsican related herion in Bavaria — which is most of it."

"How many men does he have in there?"

"Some restaurant employees. The cooks and waiters are French, and the kitchen personnel are Turks and Greeks. They've all been investigated by the BND and Interpol. We found nothing to connect them with the syndicate. However, Labou also has two security men — Marcel Crepeau and Phillippe Delouvrier. A couple of hard cases as you might call them. They also serve as Labou's bodyguards. We found nothing at all about Marcel except he was born in Nice, but Philippe has been arrested twice in Paris for assault with a deadly weapon. Both times the charges were dropped."

"Syndicate enforcers?"

"Almost certainly."

"Do they carry guns?"

"Not legally. The Nuremburg police occasionally stop and search the pair in the hopes of finding something they can charge them with, but neither man has been armed."

"In other words, they're probably not packing, but don't assume they aren't armed?"

"Exactly," the BND man nodded. "The restaurant appears to be closing for the night."

"I wonder what the escargots are like in this place," Lansing mused as he opened the car door.

"Expensive," Dieter replied.

PART OF THE *BON APPETITE* HAD BEEN DESIGNED AS A SIDE-walk cafe, but the weather had become too chilly to attract customers to that section, and the chairs, tables and umbrellas had been removed. Walking across the tiled pavement, Lansing and Dieter mounted the stone steps of the restaurant, noting the handsome curves of the building's structure and the tinted glass windows — and wondering how many lives had been ruined so the owner could build it.

Dieter turned the door knob and they entered a stylish waiting room with matching love seats, cushy armchairs and a lush blue carpet. A large photograph of the Eiffel Tower dominated one wall and cubistic paintings decorated the other three.

Two men appeared from a door at the other side of the room. A big man with broad shoulders and a barrel chest glared at them with a hard expression on his wide face. His hostile gaze favored Lansing, possibly because he recognized the American's uniform (Yankee hating is a popular pastime in France), but the major realized there may have been another reason. His smaller, leanly muscled companion's knife-scarred features were only slightly less surly.

"*Nous etes cloturer*," he said gruffly.

"*Sprechen Sie Deutsch oder English?*" Dieter inquired, producing

a pocket folder with his BND identification.

"*Oui*," the larger man replied stiffly. "Phillipe and I both speak English and we understand enough German to know what that is. What do you want?"

"We want to see Maurice Labou," Dieter said.

"Do you have a warrant, *Monsieur Policeman*?" Phillipe asked with contempt.

"Do I need one just to speak with your employer?"

"Actually, I want to see him *privately*," the major amended. "My name is Lansing. I'm with the Criminal Investigation Department of the United States Army."

Phillipe clucked his tongue. "What do you want with *Monsieur Labou*?"

"I'll tell him when I see him — *privately*," Lansing answered firmly.

"Marcel," the smaller Corsican said. "Tell *Monsieur Labou* about our visitors."

The big man grunted, then turned and left the room. Dieter leaned toward the CID investigator.

"Are you certain this is the best way to handle this?" he asked softly in German, aware Lansing understood his native language fluently and the listening Phillipe did not.

"*Nein*," the major replied. "*Aber diese ist wie Wir machen damit*," admitting he wasn't sure, but that he was already committed to the method.

Marcel returned, his face even more unpleasant than before. "*Monsieur Labou* will see the American."

Lansing stepped forward, but the two Corsicans moved into his path. "We have orders to search any unannounced visitors," Phillipe explained. "*Monsieur Labou* does not like armed guests in his office."

"The restaurant business is getting tougher every day," the major muttered.

He stepped back to unbutton his uniform tunic and drew a .45 caliber Government Issue 1911 Colt pistol from his belt. Phillipe raised an eyebrow and Marcel's scowl intensified. Lansing handed the gun to Dieter.

"Take care of this for me, will you?" he inquired.

"I have one of my own," the BND man answered, opening his jacket to allow the Corsicans to see the 9mm H&K automatic in a shoulder holster under his right arm. "But I'll make certain yours doesn't get misplaced."

Phillipe expertly frisked Lansing, feeling below the knee for ankle holsters or sheath knives, along forearms for hideout weapons and the nape of his neck in case a pistol or a bladed instrument was contained

in a pouch. Marcel examined the major's service cap. He seemed disappointed not to find a wire garrotte or razor with it. Lansing half expected the surly Corsican to rip the hat apart in sheer meanness.

"Let's go," Phillipe said, satisfied the American was unarmed.

Although the German's voice remained casual, his expression warned them that he'd be dissatisfied with a negative reply. "Pass the dining room and go down the corridor," Phillipe explained sourly. "Third door on the right."

"Thanks," Lansing replied. "Try to find out about those escargots, Karl."

"What else can I talk to them about?" the BND agent shrugged.

FOLLOWING THE CORSICAN'S DIRECTIONS, LANSING LOCATED Maurice Labou's office. The door was already open, so he entered with only a token knock. A grossly fat man, dressed in an expensive pinstripe suit, sat behind a mahogany desk. Completely bald, he resembled Humpty Dumpty in a children's book as he smiled professionally at the American.

"Please come in, Major," he greeted in excellent English. "Do excuse me for not getting up. Gout."

"Life is tough," Lansing commented.

"Help yourself to some cognac."

"No thanks," the investigator replied. "This isn't exactly a social visit."

"No?" Labou raised his thin eyebrows. "But what would your American CID want with me? I am a simple restaurant owner." He spread his hands wide in a gesture of helplessness.

Lansing glanced about the room, noting its fine furniture, dense blue carpet, well-stocked bar and wide-screen color television set. "This place doesn't look much like my office," he remarked. "I've got a little conversation piece that you don't, however. Shotgun pellets in the wall."

"Oh?" The narrow eyebrows rose again.

"Two men have been killed in my office," Lansing began. "I killed the first one more than two years ago. Maybe you remember him. His name was Gaston Foch."

"The name is not familiar, Major." Labou shrugged his round shoulders and pouted.

"Really? He worked for you, although he may not have been following your orders the night he came into my office disguised as an MP and tried to kill me."

"Rash accusations are not wise, my friend." The Corsican shook his head.

"The other man was killed just this morning. He was a janitor

named Nick Prasinós. Somebody rigged a shotgun trap in my office and murdered him instead of me. Wonder who'd want to do a thing like that."

"Perhaps I should call my lawyer."

"I'm not accusing you of anything — at least not until I get some more evidence," the major assured him. "Why don't we be frank? I'm not carrying any listening devices or tape-recorders. Although it would be a pleasure to bust a high-level *Union de Corse* boss, my primary concern is finding the person or persons who tried to kill me and murdered Mister Prasinós."

"If I was a chief in the Corsican syndicate, do you think I would admit it to or co-operate in anyway?"

"Let's play a little game, then. You pretend you're a Corsican gangster and answer my questions — unofficially, of course."

Labou smiled. "A game? *Oui*. Go ahead Major."

"You've been into narcotics, blackmarket, gun-running, all that sort of thing. Now, I come along two years ago and ruin one of your dope rackets that involved selling heroin to U.S. servicemen. I kill one of your men and arrest the American Lieutenant involved in the scheme. What's your reaction?"

"I imagine I would be unhappy," Labou admitted. "But I have more drug operations and more enforcers, yes? So I would strike it off as a business loss."

"But about a year later, I'm up around Frankfort and damned if I don't find a crooked French cop on your pay roll — or at least the *Union de Corse*'s. He's been a nice pipeline into the Paris Police Department for years. He's also a murderer, but that's beside the point. Anyway, you lose him too."

"Another annoyance," Labou shrugged. "You see, we — if I am playing this gangster I can say we referring to the *Union de Corse*, yes? — we probably have many crooked policemen in Paris, and if this man was also a murderer, we are probably better off without him. Perhaps we should thank you, Major."

"But you wouldn't put a shotgun in my office?"

"Of course not. I would continue with business the best I could. It would be as it is in my restaurant. A plate is dropped and breaks, someone walks out without paying his check, an ice carving is exposed to hot lights and melts before it is presented to the convention that ordered it. These things happen. I do not fret about such matters. I carry on my business — perhaps more cautiously — but that is all."

"No desire for revenge?"

"It would gain me nothing."

"Satisfaction?"

"Perhaps a little."

"You wouldn't be worried that I might ruin another of your plans?"

"*Oui*," the fat man said. "But to kill you might cause more trouble than it would be worth. Your CID would investigate, the Army Intelligence, the German authorities — like the man you came with — Ah! So many problems I might have! The risk would not be worth it."

"Did you think of this before or after I came here?"

"That question does not fit our game, Major," Labou smiled.

"I guess not," Lansing agreed. He realized that the conversation wouldn't gain him anything more. "Well, it's been fun. Thanks for the chat."

The major moved to the door.

"Oh, one more thing," the Corsican remarked. "If I was this person in our game, I wouldn't have you killed, but I *would* wish whoever is trying to kill you the very best of luck in his venture."

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, LANSING LOCATED THE GRAND-Life Insurance Company office building in Nuremberg. The secretary of Vice President James Gordon had a larger, better furnished office than the one the CID had supplied the investigator. The plump, middle-aged woman's eyes widened when he introduced himself, and announced that he wished to see Mister Gordon, and confessed that he did not have an appointment.

She pressed a button on the intercom on her desk.

"What is it, Mrs. Langly?" a deep, baritone voice asked from the machine. The voice sounded remarkably like the late Sgt. Gordon.

"There's a man to see you, sir," the secretary said, her expression tense. "Major Lansing from the CID."

"Lansing!" the voice barked. After a pause, it added, "Send him in."

The CID investigator entered Gordon's office to discover it was as elaborate and grand as Maurice Labou's business headquarters. It also featured a bar and a color television set as well as a picture window with a view of crowded downtown Nuremberg, which is as active a city as one can find anywhere in the world. James A. Gordon stood by his big metal and plexiglass desk and glared at Lansing. A blue, double-breasted suit covered his six-foot-one frame, concealing much of a paunchy mid-section. His face was rounder and contained more flesh than his son's, but the pale blue eyes and wide mouth were the same. He'd retained his hair, although most of the blond color had surrendered to the iron gray of middle-age.

"You've got a lot of nerve to come here, Lansing," he said gruffly.

"Next time I'll try to get an appointment," the major replied mildly. "Before we begin our conversation, let me say I'm sorry about your

son, but he didn't give me any choice. I shot him in self-defense."

"I know you convinced the Army of that," Gordon growled. "But don't expect me to believe you."

"I'm sure it's hard to accept," Lansing said. "But Sergeant Allen Gordon was a thief and a murderer. He even tried to frame an innocent woman to take the blame for killing his victim."

"You're a liar!" the executive spat. "I knew my own son, damn you!"

"You knew him once, but you didn't know what he'd become."

"I know you murdered Allen. That's enough."

"He took two shots at me before I fired back," Lansing told him. "There was a witness to the shooting, and I presented plenty of evidence at the inquest following your son's death."

"There'll be another inquest, I'll see to that!"

"I still have the evidence." The major shrugged. "Is that why you had your company transfer you to this branch? To avenge your son's death?"

"That's why you're here," Gordon smiled. "You found out about my little investigation, eh? How's it feel to be hounded for a change?"

"You're investigating me?" Lansing mused. "Did you find anything interesting?"

"More than you might guess," the executive answered sharply. "Grand-Life Insurance hires a very efficient network of investigators. They've been checking into you and they've found more than one sordid skeleton in your professional closet."

"Then they must have installed those bony gents themselves," the major said. "I haven't done anything I need to worry about, just as I have no reason to feel guilty about killing a man in self-defense."

"Really, Lansing?" Gordon inquired with a twisted sneer. "On several occasions you've delivered suspects to the MPs that are in less than unmarred condition. Punched, kicked, broken bones sometimes — you like to play rough."

"You'd be surprised how many killers tend to object to being arrested," Lansing replied dryly.

"There's also proof that you've bent a lot of rules, such as breaking and entering and withholding information from your superiors."

"An officer in the United States Army doesn't have to have a search warrant to investigate military quarters; he only needs to have a valid reason," Lansing sighed. "They'll have to change the Uniform Code of Military Justice for you to make that charge stick. As for withholding information, you can tell your investigators to inform Major Conglose that the reason I haven't kept him fully briefed in the past is because he tends to act too quickly before all the evidence is conclusive. That's why he's under a cloud at CID right now. You might also warn him

that the Army doesn't approve of supplying civilians with derogatory information about a field grade office, and blabbing to your snoop patrol could be the final nail in the coffin of his career."

"You smug bastard!" Gordon snarled. "I'd like to punch your face in!"

"How about blowing me in half with a shotgun?" Lansing asked. "Somebody tried that yesterday morning."

Gordon stared at him for a moment, astonishment filling his expression. "You're trying to accuse me of that?"

"The booby trap killed a janitor," the major continued. "If somebody was trying for revenge, he missed."

"Those gold oakleaves on your shoulders don't make you immune to slander and libel charges, Lansing!"

"Being a powerful insurance executive doesn't make you invulnerable either, Mister Gordon. Something for *you* to remember. If your investigators try to present false information about me — and that's the only kind they could use to condemn me — I know some very fine lawyers in the Judge Advocate General's Office."

"You're lying about that attempt on your life, aren't you?"

"Ask your snoopers. And professional key-hole peekers had better be the *only* type of men you've hired concerning me."

"Meaning?" Gordon demanded angrily.

"If you've bought an assassin, I'll send him back in a pine box, and then I'll pay you another visit."

The major turned and headed for the door.

"Lansing!" the executive shouted, his face as red as a tomato. "I don't know who's trying to kill you, but I hope they succeed!"

"I've heard that before," Lansing told him. "But neither of you should get your hopes too high."

MAJOR LANSING SPENT MOST OF THE AFTERNOON ON THE telephone. He called Army Intelligence to discuss the possibility of terrorists or KGB assassins being involved in the plot to kill him. Lansing also asked them to look into James Gordon and see if he had any shady associates in Europe or the States. He also told them to contact the CIA and ask them to investigate the same matters. Both Army Intelligence and the Central Intelligence Agency owed Lansing more than one favor, not that that meant either organization would necessarily feel obliged to help him now.

He then called Karl Dieter and asked if the BND had uncovered any leads. The German agent had nothing new to report about the Corsican or terrorist angles and he agreed to look into James Gordon's activities since he'd arrived in Europe. Dieter was surprised when Lansing requested he also investigate Nick Prasinos' background.

"I have to consider every possibility," the CID man explained. "Maybe Prasinos had made some nasty enemies. Perhaps the killer has already claimed the victim he wanted."

"I suppose nothing is impossible," Dieter replied. "Except trying to learn the price of escargots at the *Bon Appetite*. Marcel and Phillipe simply refused to tell me last night."

Lansing chuckled. "I appreciate your help, Karl."

"I'm pleased to be able to return the favor. I'll stop by your apartment at the USAEUR officers' bachelors' quarters tonight. Take care my friend. I doubt that the man we're after went to so much trouble to kill a janitor."

LANSING EVEN CALLED MAJOR ZAVARJ AT THE ISRAELI Embassy in Bonn. One of the *Mossad* officer's men had had a confrontation with Lansing in the past and the CID investigator didn't dismiss the possibility that the Israeli agent might decide to settle an old score with bloodshed. Zavarj assured Lansing that Yuri had not engaged in any extracurricular mayhem. The American thanked the *Mossad* commander and hung up. He wondered why he'd bothered to call in the first place. If Yuri was responsible, Zavarj might not be aware of it and if he did know, he wouldn't admit it. Still, the Israelis wouldn't approve of one of their own indulging in unofficial vengeance. If Yuri had an "accident," it would mean the *Mossad* had taken care of the problem for Lansing.

SP5 Wendy Davis entered the major's office. She sank into a chair by Lansing's desk and crossed her sleek legs. Those legs had once saved Lansing's life when they served to distract Gaston Foch. Lansing couldn't blame the Corsican hitman for that. He'd found Wendy distracting on numerous occasions himself.

"How'd the visit to Beverly Conglose go?" the major asked.

"She's a nice lady," Wendy answered. "I wonder why she married Conglose."

"I do, too," Lansing admitted.

"Well, she remembers you and everything you did for her last Christmas. She can't understand why her husband doesn't like you, but she's certain he wouldn't try to kill you."

"Can she shed any light on the major's activities between 0100 hours and 0200 hours — the time the lab boys estimate the shotgun was rigged in my office — the other night?"

"Her husband told her the same thing he reported to CID headquarters before he left the apartment," Wendy answered. "Major Conglose said, *I'm going out and get drunk, but I promise not to be an embarrassment to the Army*. Then he left the apartment about ten

thirty. Mrs. Conglose waited up for him until about one a.m. before she went to bed. He came home some time later."

"Was he intoxicated?"

"She said he smelled like he'd been drinking and he acted as though he had a terrible hang-over," Wendy frowned. "Mrs. Conglose also said it was the first time he'd had any liquor in over three years. I didn't think he drank."

"Maybe he's learning," Lansing remarked. "His military career is in danger and for him, that's his whole life."

"And he blames you for it."

"He has to blame someone. That doesn't mean he tried to kill me."

"I find it hard to believe he could be a murderer too, sir," Wendy said. "We've both known him for over two years and maybe that's why our judgement is tilted in his favor."

"After knowing him for two years, I'd say our opinion of him was somewhat less than favorable."

"But we didn't think he was capable of that." She tilted her head toward the buckshot scarred wall.

"No," Lansing agreed.

"Still, this happened at the same time as his restriction. That's a mighty big coincidence."

"No more so than James Gordon's move to Nuremburg."

"He's been here six months."

"It might take six months to find enough information to set up that ambush," Lansing replied. "Perhaps longer."

"Another thing Mrs. Conglose said is that the major is planning to see a JAG lawyer about charging you with attempting to defame his character."

"Why should he be any different from the other suspects in this case?" the homicide investigator groaned.

LANSING MOUNTED THE STAIRWELL OF THE OFFICERS' bachelors' quarters of the U.S. Army housing district seven miles from CID headquarters. As he approached his apartment, the major mentally leafed through his list of suspects. Conglose, the Corsicans, Gordon and who else? He considered motives, opportunities and personalities. Lansing inserted his key into the door, carefully using it to feel for any trip wires or triggering devices that might be attached to a bomb strapped to the door. He stepped to one side as he turned the knob and swung the door open, relieved when nothing went *boom*.

The precautions he'd been taking since the attempt on his life were beginning to affect Lansing's nerves. Checking his car for booby traps, peeking under his bed for hidden assassins, glancing over his shoulder constantly — it was all frustrating. If he didn't solve the puzzle within a

month, he felt sure he'd be a total paranoid. Still, he entered his apartment cautiously, trying to present a small target, his hand poised near the Colt .45 inside his jacket.

The familiar shapes of furniture in his apartment seemed sinister in the darkness. Lansing gazed over the stationary forms with suspicion. Jumping at shadows is no way for a man to live. He reached for the wall switch, deciding that the light might dispell his fears — if they were groundless — or it would work in his favor if there was an assailant lying in wait since the killer's eyes would be adjusted to the dark. Lansing flicked the switch.

Nothing happened.

Instantly, the CID investigator dropped to the floor. If the lightbulb had burned out, he'd feel silly about his reaction later. A harsh metallic cough and the sound of something hard striking the wall above Lansing confirmed his suspicion. The click of the light switch served as a guide for the killer to locate his intended victim in the dim room. Lansing saw the faint orange blink of the silencer-equipped weapon when the ambusher fired another round into the wall.

Lansing drew the big .45 pistol and returned fire. His Colt roared and its unfettered muzzle flash blazed through the darkness like a winking flare. The heavy 250 grain slug smashed into the backrest of the armchair the assassin had used for cover. Lansing saw the outline of the killer's head and shoulders when the man recoiled in alarm and snapped another shot at the major. Lansing had already rolled toward the shelter of a bookcase and the muffled bullet slammed in the floor harmlessly. The .45 roared again, but the shadowy figure darted into the darkness of the kitchenette, untouched by the bullet.

Rising to a crouched position, Lansing advanced slowly, finding comfort in the weight of the big pistol in his hand. Cordite from spent gunpowder filled his nostrils as he approached the kitchenette, prepared to fire at the killer as soon as he spied the sinister form once more. Then he heard a door slam.

"Damn," he rasped. There was an exit in the kitchenette that led directly to the fire stairs. The killer was escaping — or had he merely slammed the door to try to lure Lansing into the kitchenette and still lurked in the next room, waiting for his intended victim?

"Major!" a voice in the corridor knifed through the ringing in Lansing's ears from the gunshots fired within the confined area. "Major, are you all right?"

The investigator entered the kitchenette, the Colt in a two-handed Weaver's grip, the muzzle swinging from object to object. No one was there. He scrambled to the exit, jerked open the door and aimed the pistol at the fire stairs. The light above the concrete steps and metal handrail revealed nothing. The killer had gotten away.

"Major?" the voice of Captain Glen Thorn, one of Lansing's neighbors in the building, inquired. "What happened?"

The young officer had mustered enough courage to finally enter the apartment as Lansing turned on a light in the kitchenette. Thorn stared at the Colt automatic in the major's fist and backed away nervously.

"I had a visitor," Lansing explained, slipping the safety catch on and putting the gun in his belt. "Rude sort. Shoot and run."

"We'd better call the MPs," Thorn said. "I mean, I know you're a homicide investigator, but . . ."

"You're right, Captain," Lansing said. "The MPs should be called in."

More voices floated from the corridor and leery residents collected outside the door of Lansing's apartment. He paid little attention to them as he carried a chair from the kitchenette into the front room and stood on it to reach the light in the ceiling. The bulb had been unscrewed far enough from the socket to prevent it from working. The major twisted the bulb into place, averting his eyes from the sudden glare as it burst into 100 watt life.

"Look, Major!" Thorn exclaimed, pointing at the bullet-ripped armchair the killer had hidden behind.

Lansing saw the single piece of paper covered with small print, pinned to the vinyl backrest. It was a page from the Holy Bible. A passage had been underlined in red ink.

"NUMBERS 35: VERSE NINETEEN," GENERAL CLAYTON READ aloud. "*'The avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.'*" He lowered the page. "At least the killer isn't an atheist."

Major Lansing poured black coffee into three cups on the table in his kitchenette. Karl Dieter nodded his thanks. The BND agent had arrived a few minutes after the shooting with the material he'd promised to bring Lansing. The military police had already come and gone. Someone in the apartment building had called Clayton and informed him of the incident. The general joined them roughly an hour after the gun battle.

"Well, gentlemen," Clayton sighed. "This Bible passage seems to solve the case quite neatly."

"Perhaps too neatly, sir," Lansing commented.

"The 'avenger of blood' in the Old Testament refers to a relative of a murder victim who personally executes the assailant. That description only fits one suspect in this case — James A. Gordon."

"So it appears, General," Dieter stated. "But I agree with Cliff. Let's not assume too much too quickly."

"Did you get a good look at the assassin?" Clayton asked the major.

The homicide investigator shook his head. "I couldn't judge his height or build in the dark, let alone see his face. The three spent cartridge casings from his pistol are nine-millimeters, which is a common caliber throughout the world — especially in Europe. The sound-suppressor on his weapon was a professional job. It muffled shots well and reduced muzzle-flash effectively. His marksmanship didn't seem exceptional, but a silencer tends to reduce accuracy and he was shooting in the dark. I didn't do very well myself or we'd have the answer to this puzzle lying on the floor with a .45 round in him."

"The killer may have been using a gun he wasn't familiar with," Dieter added. "We're certain the shotgun is a blackmarket piece. He may have gotten the pistol the same way."

"He moved pretty fast," Lansing added. "Faster than I'd imagine Conglose or Gordon could manage, although being shot at can turn anyone into a human gazelle."

"Gordon wouldn't have tried to kill you himself," Clayton declared. "He probably hired someone to do it."

"That's assuming he's responsible," Dieter remarked. "Leaving that Bible passage seems too obvious a clue. It's as if Gordon had left a signed confession behind."

"It may have been left to distract our attention from the real killer and place the blame on Gordon," Lansing commented, sipping his coffee thoughtfully.

"But who knew about Gordon?" the general asked. "Did your organization discover anything to link him with the Corsican syndicate or any other possible suspects, *Herr* Dieter?"

"No," the BND man replied. "The only irregular activities we've uncovered about James Gordon is that he has hired several investigators — German Nationals as well as members of his company's security department — to look into Major Lansing's past and present in the hopes of ruining his future."

"That would give him a source of information about CID headquarters and this apartment, explaining both attempts on Cliff's life."

"The Corsicans could have acquired the same data — or anyone else could have, for that matter — by simply bribing former employees at your headquarters and following Cliff for a couple of days," Dieter mused. "And of course Major Conglose already knows all about such things."

"But Conglose *doesn't* know about James Gordon," Clayton insisted.

The major didn't explain that Conglose had in fact, co-operated with Gordon's investigators and fully realized that the insurance executive was trying to destroy Lansing for the death of Sgt. Gordon. Information about Conglose's attempt to sabotage Lansing's career would probably

influence the general to court-martial the narcotics investigator. Despite everything Conglose had done and tried to do, Lansing didn't feel malice toward his fellow officer, and he didn't want to wreck Conglose's military career — and his life — unless he had to. Of course, he'd *have to* if Conglose proved to be guilty.

"Either there's a connection between Gordon and *someone* else or he's the man we want," Clayton declared. "Now, how do we find the answer? That's your expertise, Cliff."

"I have a theory," Lansing replied slowly. "In order to prove it, I may have to bend a couple of regulations."

"Oh, no," the general moaned.

"Karl, I could use your help."

"You've got it," Dieter assured him.

"I think I'll leave now," Clayton remarked. "I suspect the less I know about your plan, the better, *Major*." He addressed Lansing formally as a subtle warning not to foul up.

"I'll let you know the outcome, sir," the investigator replied.

"What *can* you tell me now?" the general asked.

"I suspect the Bible passage was *not* left as a distraction," Lansing answered. "But we might be chasing after the wrong '*avenger of blood*'."

PHILLIPE DELOUVRIER ANSWERED THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR of the *Bon Appetite Restaurant*. The scarfaced Corsican glared at Major Lansing with surprise and alarm. The American stepped inside.

"We are closed," Phillipe said flatly. "What do you want, *Monsieur*?"

"Don't you remember me?" Lansing inquired.

"*Oui*," the hood nodded. "But *Monsieur Labou* does not wish to be disturbed."

"None of us gets everything we want out of life," the major said.

Marcel Crepeau entered the lobby. His scowling face became even more unpleasant. "What is *he* doing here?"

"The American wishes to see *Monsieur Labou*," Phillipe shrugged.

"Then we must frisk him first," Marcel growled.

"You first, Foch," Lansing said coldly.

Marcel's eyes widened and his hand dove inside his suit jacket. Lansing stepped forward and swung a fast *mae geri keage* ball-of-the-foot kick under the big Corsican's last rib on his right side. Marcel groaned and began to fold at the middle, winded by the blow. The major's other leg swiftly followed with a high side-kick, driving the bottom of his foot into Marcel's face.

The big man fell heavily. Phillipe lashed a *savate* kick at the major's groin. The edge of Lansing's left hand slashed a *shuto* karate-chop to

the shin of the attacking leg. Phillipe stumbled and Lansing smashed the heel of his palm into the Corsican's breastbone.

Phillipe slammed into a wall, bounced off and once again revealed his training in *savate* by launching a high round-house kick at Lansing's head. The CID man deflected the leg with a forearm block. He scooped up Phillipe's outstretched limb with both arms, bending at the knees and pivoting slightly. The Corsican cried out as Lansing pulled the captive leg and hurled Phillipe over his shoulder. The hood crashed to the floor hard.

Marcel rose to one knee, blood trickling from his nose and mouth. He dragged a French MAB 9mm pistol from a shoulder holster. A metallic click froze his action and he stared into the big black muzzle of Lansing's .45 Colt.

"I won't miss this time, Foch," the major stated flatly. "You can either drop that gun or I'll blow your head off, and I frankly don't give a damn which you chose."

Marcel dropped the pistol.

"What is the meaning of this?" Maurice Labou demanded.

The fat man stood in the corridor leading to his office. He leaned heavily on a stout cane, trying to keep a bandaged, gout-stricken foot above the floor. Lansing barely glanced at him.

"I'm arresting one of your men for murder and attempted murder, Labou," he replied.

"What? That is insane!" the Corsican snapped.

"Marcel Crepeau is actually the brother of Gaston Foch; the man I killed more than two years ago in my office. He changed his name before leaving France to join your section to hunt me down for revenge." The major smiled. "As if you didn't know."

"But, *Monsieur* Lansing," Labou said. "Don't you remember what I said that killing you would gain the Corsican syndicate nothing? It would in fact be contrary to the *Union de Corse's* best interests."

"We aren't playing games now," Lansing told him. "Sure, my death would be a problem if your organization was blamed for it. But you knew Marcel was planning to avenge Gaston's death. That meant he'd kill me without acting on orders from the syndicate. Then what would happen, Labou? You'd have this dumb bastard taken care of and come up with some sort of story about how he went berserk and had to be killed. An investigation would reveal his true name. Marcel's reason for killing me would satisfy the inquest into my death and the *Union de Corse* wouldn't officially be connected with the crime."

"I do not think that story will hold up in court," Labou remarked, dipping a hand into a pocket of his pin-striped suit jacket. Lansing noticed a bulge in the cloth.

"Hands where I can see them," the major warned. He swung the

Colt toward the fat man, but still watched Marcel via the corner of his eye. "You realize that when Marcel stands trial he'll talk his head off about your operations to try to get a lighter sentence for himself."

Labou's fingers emerged empty. "Anything he knows about will be taken care of before your American Army or the BND can investigate."

"Then you'd better do it quickly," Karl Dieter's voice announced as he entered the lobby, his H&K pistol in his fist. "Because we're starting our investigation right now!"

MAJOR LANSING EXPLAINED THE CASE TO SP5 WENDY DAVIS the following morning in his office.

"Marcel's attitude had been very hostile toward me when we first met," the investigator explained. "But I didn't have any solid proof to connect him with the killing until he left that Bible passage in my apartment. James Gordon isn't stupid enough to point the finger of guilt at himself by ordering an assassin to leave that page behind."

"How'd you know Major Conglose hadn't done it to put the blame on Gordon?" Wendy asked.

"I didn't," Lansing admitted. "But I didn't really think he was a murderer either. Neither did you. The answer to both solving the case and clearing Conglose — if he was innocent — was to confront Marcel. When I addressed him by his real last name, the name of Gaston Foch's brother, he reacted as I hoped he would. If he'd kept his cool, we might still be in the middle of an intersection with twenty roads going in all directions and confused as hell about which one to take."

"Is there enough evidence to convict Marcel?"

"Plenty," the major replied with pleasure. "Besides my own testimony and Karl Dieter's, the ballistics of the bullets he fired in my apartment match the MAB pistol in his possession. The BND also has Labou under arrest with a number of charges including an accomplice to murder. After Marcel and Phillipe do a little singing, the Corsican syndicate should suffer quite a blow here in Bavaria."

"There'll always be another Labou," Wendy sighed.

"And there'll always be men like Karl Dieter — thank God."

"I know," she smiled. "I work for one of them."

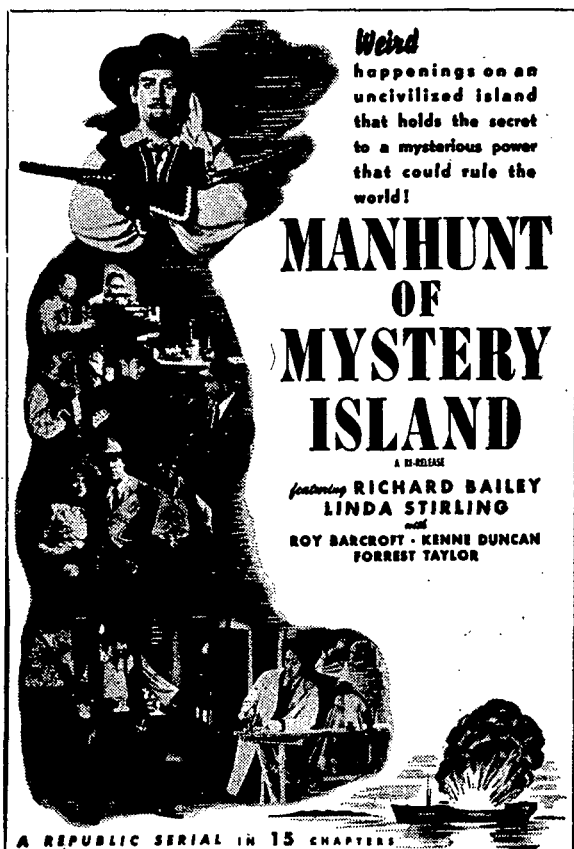
Major Conglose entered the office without knocking, as was his habit. His expression was more sour than usual, but he seemed more angry than crestfallen.

"The general gave me an official reprimand," he announced with a pout. "It goes in my record, damn it, and my chances of making lieutenant colonel are blown to hell!"

"But you're not under restriction any more, you've retained your field grade rank, and there won't be any court martial," the homicide investigator pointed out. "Seems you've got a lot to be thankful for."

"Do I?" Conglose scowled. "Of course you're feeling smug, aren't you? You feel I owe you one now!"

"One?" Lansing chuckled. "Major, I gave up counting them a long time ago."



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Guns don't kill people. Sometimes they do worse!

The Caliber of Death

by CLAYTON MATTHEWS

SAM PRESCOTT KNEW THE MAN WAS A COP THE MOMENT HE saw him come into the shop. Since Sam, in the course of his business as Maywood's one and only gunsmith, had to deal with them almost daily, he knew many of the men on the force.

But not this one. This one he hadn't seen before. He was in his early thirties, possibly late twenties, with a hard face all planes and angles, and flat brown eyes. He was big, well over six feet, with wide shoulders, wearing a gray suit off the rack, a white shirt and dark tie. He was carrying an attache case.

Sam leaned on his crutches and watched the man approach. Pistols and rifles of every size and description, many dismantled, surrounded Sam, the pieces strewn all over the counter, like bits of several picture puzzles, and only Sam knowing where all the pieces fit.

The big man in gray stopped at the counter, carefully pushing aside gun parts to find room for the attache case. "Sergeant Roger Marsh, Homicide."

Sam stuck out a huge hand. "Pleased to meet you, Sergeant. New, aren't you?"

"Fairly new, yes." Sergeant Marsh accepted the handshake.

"Now, what can I do for you, Sergeant?"

"I have a piece here . . ."

The sergeant thumbed open the attache case and removed a pistol wrapped in a sheet of plastic. He placed it on the counter.

Sam eased himself onto the high swivel stool, propping his crutches up beside him. He took out a thin, black cigar and fired it, his gaze never leaving the pistol. "Used in a homicide, was it?"

"That's our problem. We're not sure. Three possibles — a suicide, an accident, or homicide."

"Pretty much covers the field," Sam said dryly. "What do you want from me?"

"First off, was it purchased here?"

"I sell very few weapons, sergeant, and never to strangers, only my friends. My business is working on guns, not selling them. Let's see. . . ." He picked up the pistol and looked for the serial number, then shook his gray-shocked head. "Nope, I didn't sell this weapon Sergeant Marsh."

The man's heavy eyebrows arched. "You know just like that, without checking the number against your list?"

"I am blessed with a photographic memory, Sergeant." Sam grinned. "Or cursed. Take your pick."

"So that takes care of that. I didn't think you had sold it; the guys who know you said you don't sell guns to Tom, Dick and Harry. What can you tell me about the piece, if anything?"

Sam picked up the pistol. "Okay to take it out?"

"Feel free. It's gone through all the lab routine." The officer took out a pack of cigarettes, shook one free. "No useful prints, by the way."

Sam unwrapped the plastic from around the pistol. "That should eliminate two of your possibles."

"Not necessarily. There were prints, but they were too smudged to be of any value." Sergeant Marsh blew smoke. "It does cast some doubt on the accident theory, I agree. But not suicide. I'll get to the why in a minute."

"You mean the victim, or the deceased, wanted his suicide to look like murder? Like too young an insurance policy?"

"Right. I'm not going to faint away with astonishment, Mr. Prescott. I've been told that you've helped us with cases in the past, how sharp you are. So you've gone right to the nub of it." He grinned. "The deceased had a large life policy, three hundred grand. It was taken out six months ago. I don't have to tell you that in this state the insurer has two years from the date the policy is issued to contest the cause of death. If it is suicide, they don't have to pay. So . . ." The sergeant shrugged. "What can you tell me about the piece?"

"Sam, please, Sergeant," Sam said absently. "Well, it's a U.S. Army Colt .45. It's a semi-automatic, hand-held weapon, using .45 caliber ammunition. It weighs two and a half pounds, holds seven

cartridges in a clip, and has a muzzle velocity of 850 feet per second. And it has been fired once." He sniffed the pistol. "Hard to tell how recently."

"Wow!" The officer whistled. "Well, I asked, didn't I? Thing is, I feel I now know more about the piece than I want to know!"

Sam smiled. "Just showing off a little, Sergeant." He replaced the pistol in the plastic. "Did you find the bullet?"

"Not yet. They're doing an autopsy on the body right now." The sergeant glanced at his watch. "Should be about finished. May I use your phone?"

SAM WAVED A HAND AT THE TELEPHONE ON THE COUNTER. Sergeant Marsh picked up the receiver and dialed. He spoke softly into it, then cradled it in the crook of his shoulder. "A pistol of this caliber would leave powder burns, if held close enough, wouldn't it, Sam?"

"Any weapon would, if held close enough. A .45 more than most. Were there powder burns?"

The sergeant nodded. "Yes, on the shirt and around the entrance to the chest wound. But that only tells us that he was shot at close range."

"How about a nitrate test, to see if the deceased fired the weapon?"

"Inconclusive. You know how unreliable nitrate tests are . . . Yes, Doctor?" He turned his attention to the phone, listening.

In a moment a soft grunt came from him, and Sam saw his eyes widen. He listened for a moment longer, then said, "Thank you, Doctor." He hung up slowly. "I'll be damned! That's a stunner!"

"They found the bullet?"

"They found it. It was lodged against a bone, but here's the thing . . . It's a .22 caliber, not a .45!"

"That does put a different face on it. No doubt at all it's the bullet that did the job?"

"Has to be. There was no other bullet. It passed directly through the heart. In most circumstances it would have gone all the way through. The medical examiner says it's only a freak that it lodged where it did. Of course, if it *had* been a .45, it probably would have gone all the way through. So now it looks like a whole new ball game." He jerked a thumb at the .45. "It would seem that this one isn't the piece used."

"This weapon was found near the victim?"

"Within a few inches of his hand. But that's not the whole of it. His body was found in a locked room."

Sam's gray eyes lighted up. "Sounds intriguing. Care to tell me about it?"

"Sure. It gets weirder by the minute. If you can come up with any

ideas, I'd be grateful. Let's see . . . The victim was one Monroe Wilson, male Caucasian, 51, a little overweight, something of a womanizer. Fairly well off, I gather. Owned a half interest in Imperial Used Cars. They have two lots, one at the intersection of First and Main, the other out on the highway east of town."

"Married?"

"Married. Not very long, I understand, a couple of years. And he's been living apart from his wife. They split up about two months ago, the way it was told to me. Wilson had been living in a furnished apartment over on Arvis Street. Fourth floor."

"What's this about a locked room?"

"The apartment had one door opening into the hall. There is a pushbutton lock on the door and a chain, the kind hooking into a slot on the wall. The lock was pushed in, the chain hooked. We had to break down the door."

"How did you get onto it?"

"Wilson had a woman in to clean once a week. This was her morning. Nobody answered her ring, and she could hear the TV blaring. That's probably why the neighbors didn't hear the shots. The cleaning woman had a key. When she couldn't get in, she called us."

Sam nodded thoughtfully. "Where was the body found?"

"In the middle of the living room, lying face up."

"Windows?"

"The only window accessible to anything other than a fly is the one opening onto the fire escape, at the end of a short hall, and that was latched from the inside. Not only latched, but painted over. I doubt it has been opened in years. One window in the living room was open. But there is no way anyone could have gotten in or out of it without leaving signs."

"How about a sniper from outside?"

"With a .22, Sam? No buildings of equal height anywhere near. And with the deceased lying facing the front door? There is no way that slug could have entered the body except from the front."

Sam drew on his cigar. "I'm beginning to see your problem, Sergeant. And a .22 caliber bullet in a corpse with a .45 at hand only complicates things for you."

"You can repeat that a number of times," the sergeant said glumly.

"How about suspects? In case you decide it's murder?"

"Several possibles, from my sketchy investigation so far. As I said, Wilson played around. A man like that, there're usually a few disgruntled playmates lurking about. And the wife, of course. Rena Wilson."

"Jealousy motive? Or the insurance policy?"

"I doubt that she was jealous. She claims she was only too glad to be rid of him. She is the beneficiary of the policy. But here we stumble onto a problem. If she was after the three hundred thou, why try to make it look like suicide?"

"How about Wilson's business partner?"

"Ted Miles, yeah. The two men have one of those partnership agreements. You know, the surviving partner gets the other's share of the business on death. And if you're wondering about alibis, neither wife nor partner have what might be called ironclad ones. The wife says she was in bed asleep last night at one-thirty, the approximate time of death. The partner is a bachelor and claims he was home all evening. He even gave me the detailed plot of a movie he was watching on the tube. But it was an old one and he could easily have seen it at some other time."

"And a policeman is more apt to be suspicious if the suspect *has* an alibi."

"Right, Sam." The sergeant grinned in appreciation.

"No suicide note?"

"No note. But then all suicides don't leave notes, contrary to the popular belief." Sergeant Marsh fished out and lit a fresh cigarette, sighing heavily. "So I'm right back to square one."

"Do you happen to know if the victim's wife knows anything about guns?"

"No, but I can damned soon find out. Do you think . . .?"

Sam made a dismissing gesture. "I don't think anything yet. It might not be a bad idea to check out the partner for the same thing."

"Will do, Sam. Thanks for the help."

"I haven't been a great deal of help."

"Just talking about it helped clear up my thinking."

Sam picked up his crutches and came around the counter, dragging his useless legs. Years of manipulating himself around had developed tremendous power in his shoulders, forearms and hands.

He accompanied Sergeant Marsh to the door. With a flip of his hand the homicide detective walked to the unmarked car at the curb and drove away.

A nice guy, Sam thought, a nice cop. A great many cops rejected accepting help or suggestions from civilians. Even when they did, all too many were ungracious about it.

But then Maywood's Finest wasn't a big city police force, with its heavy crime load and frustrations. A quiet, leisurely, semi-Southern city of something over fifty thousand, Maywood had probably a dozen homicides a year.

Nothing like the criminal savagery of New York's streets, with the

steaming ghettos growing like poisonous mushrooms.

Sam snorted softly to himself, and swung back inside. He eased onto his stool, frowning in deep thought, absently drumming his fingers on the counter top. After a moment he roused, fired up a cigar and pulled the phone toward him.

He dialed a number and said into the mouthpiece, "May I speak to Carl Moretti, please?"

He waited a moment. When a hearty voice boomed a hello over the line, Sam said, "Hi, Carl. Sam Prescott here. How are you? Oh, I'm making out. Carl, how's the used car business these days?"

SERGEANT MARSH DIDN'T CALL UNTIL THE NEXT AFTER-noon. Sam had about given him up.

"Sam? We found the murder piece. After our little talk yesterday, I had a half-dozen men comb the garbage cans in the neighborhood. They found it a block away."

"A .22, of course."

"Yep. A Saturday night special. You can buy one anywhere."

Sam closed his eyes. "One of those."

"We're running a trace on it. No luck so far. The other thing we were talking about . . . I learned that Mrs. Wilson knows very little about guns. And by the way, we found out who owns the .45. It belonged to Wilson himself. He had owned it for years, never had it registered. His wife had forgotten about it. Or claims she had."

"How about Wilson's partner? Miles, is it?"

"What about him?"

"Does he know anything about guns?"

"Oh . . . Yes, he does. He's a member of the Maywood Hills Gun Club."

Sam said slowly, "I see."

"See what?" The sergeant sounded discouraged. "You mean you've figured it out?"

"I didn't say that."

"Now look, Sam, if you have an idea about this thing, clue me in." There was a rasp of irritation in the sergeant's voice. "It is my case, you know."

"I know, Sergeant, I know. I'm not trying to be difficult. I just don't want to pass on a wild-hair theory that might open up a whole can of worms." Sam drummed on the counter. He took a deep breath. "Sergeant, what I am about to propose is highly unorthodox, against all proper police procedure but . . . Could you get the wife and partner over here this evening?"

"To your shop?"

"Yep."

"Wow! You don't ask much, do you, Sam?" Sergeant Marsh was silent for a little.

Sam waited him out, drawing on his cigar.

"All right, Sam, I'll see what I can do. They *are* suspects, after all. I can't arrest them, but maybe I can throw a scare into them. I don't know why the hell I'm doing this. If it blows up, it's my neck on the block."

"I understand that, and I appreciate it, Sergeant."

TED MILES WAS A BEEFY MAN OF FIFTY, WITH A BOOZER'S veined nose and a blustery manner. Rena Wilson was a slender brunette of forty who seemed pretty much in command of herself. Yet Sam sensed a strong tension underneath the cool exterior.

Both were unhappy about being there and let a harried Sergeant Marsh know it when Sam was introduced as a gunsmith.

"A *gunsmith!*" Ted Miles exclaimed.

"Yes, Sergeant. I think you owe us an explanation. You said it had something to do with my husband's death."

"It does, Mrs. Marsh," the sergeant said. "Mr. Prescott is . . . uh, working with us as a sort of consultant. A gun expert."

"This had better be worthwhile, Mr. Prescott," said the small, slender, immaculately dressed man with them. "This is a great inconvenience to my clients, as well as myself."

Sam said, "And you are . . . ?"

"This is Garth Hollister, Sam," Sergeant Marsh said. "He's their attorney."

"Representing both parties?"

"There is nothing unusual about that," Hollister said coldly. I was Mr. Wilson's attorney. I am now attending to the affairs of his estate. And since Mr. Miles does not have an attorney of record, he wished me to represent him."

"I think you will find this little gathering worthwhile, Counselor. If you will all follow me, please."

Sam swung about on his crutches and clumped toward the back room. Sam's work bench was here, along with a small, gas-fired forge, cooling pots in which metal could be melted and shaped, a drill press, a lathe, a metal-cutting band saw. Most of his tools were back here, but over the years Sam had gradually developed a habit of doing much of his work at the counter in the front room. He manned the shop alone, and it was much easier to be in the other room when a customer came in.

He had arranged folding chairs before his work bench. The three

visitors sat, Sergeant Marsh taking up a position behind them, arms folded across his chest.

Sam said, "Would anybody care for a drink?"

Ted Miles licked his lips. "Well . . ."

Mrs. Wilson broke in crisply, "This is not a social occasion."

Garth Hollister said, "Yes, Mr. Prescott, I suggest you get on with whatever you're going to do. I warn you that I am not a patient man."

Sam shrugged. He said dryly, "I will endeavor to oblige, Mr. Hollister. As you may know, the police are having difficulty deciding if the death of Mr. Wilson was murder or suicide . . ."

An exclamation came from Rena Wilson. She leaned forward. "Of course it was murder! My husband would never have killed himself!"

"I agree with you, Mrs. Wilson. Your husband was murdered."

"Are you making an accusation, Mr. Prescott?"

"Not yet, Counselor. If you will bear with me for a moment." Sam cleared his throat. "As I reconstruct the crime, Mr. Wilson was killed in a manner to make his death appear suicide, what with the locked room gimmick and all. If the police had somehow gone for that verdict, fine and dandy. But the murderer was thinking beyond that. It was rigged to appear a hastily arranged suicide, so that the police would *think* it had been done that way to cover up a murder."

"Sounds awfully complicated to me," the attorney snapped. "Why would this hypothetical murderer go to so much trouble?"

"We'll get to that in a moment. First, suppose we go into the matter of a dead man discovered in a locked room."

While his audience watched intently, Sam rummaged around on the work bench and found a wire coat hanger. With a twist of his powerful hands, he straightened it out, leaving the hook alone. Then he twisted it in the middle to form a sharp angle.

"I have a chain on my back door, also a pushbutton lock. But that type of lock needs only a finger to push it in when closing the door."

He thumped on his crutches to the back door, unlocked it and pushed it open. "Now watch how easy a trick it is."

Standing outside, he closed the door to within an inch of the jamb. He balanced easily on his crutches and angled the bent coat hanger back inside. Adroitly he snagged the hook in a link of the door chain, closed the door until it was flush against the hanger wire. With hardly any fumbling at all, he guided the end of the chain into the slot in the wall.

"Simple, isn't it?" he called inside.

"The way you do it, yeah," Sergeant Marsh said.

Sam reversed the process, unhooking the chain, and came back

inside. He grinned at the officer. "Just takes a little practice, Sergeant."

The attorney said tartly, "Very entertaining, Mr. Prescott, but I fail to see the relevance."

"Well, at least we know how our murderer got out, managing to leave the door locked from the inside." Sam moved to the work bench. He indicated two pistols lying side by side. "A .45 Colt, similar to the one found beside the body. And a .22 caliber, nowadays often known as a Saturday night special. The striking power of both weapons varies considerably, depending on the powder load and other factors. In most circumstances, a slug fired from a .45 at close range will penetrate all the way through the human body, while a .22 often does not. That is what puzzled me when I learned that the victim was actually killed with a .22. Why, when a .45 would have been much surer and was available?"

Sergeant Marsh stirred. "So why, Sam?"

"Because that way, a .22 bullet in the victim, a .45 close at hand, the police would never conclude it was suicide, only arranged to look that way by someone who knew little about guns."

The sergeant said, "Yet the .45 had been fired once, Sam. Into what?"

"Yes, both weapons were fired. The .45 was fired out the open window, after Monroe Wilson was already dead."

Hollister said, "I still fail to see . . ."

Sam rode over him, "That way, suspicion would immediately fall on Mrs. Wilson. She knows nothing about guns, so on the surface it would appear a rather clumsy attempt at camouflaging a murder as suicide. But only if she had committed the crime, of course. In fact, the killer's cleverness went a little *too* far." Sam smiled grimly. "It would have probably worked better as a staged suicide, using the .45. But our culprit had to hedge all bets and provide the police with a ready-made suspect. Mrs. Wilson."

"If Mrs. Wilson didn't do it," Sergeant Marsh said softly, "that leaves only one person here . . ."

"Yeah."

The sergeant dropped his arms and moved to stand directly behind the chair Ted Miles occupied.

The car dealer, who had seemed to be dozing through it all, sat up abruptly. "What the hell is going on here? Are you accusing me of . . ." He tried a laugh. "What motive would I have for killing Monroe?"

"How's the used car business, Mr. Miles?" Sam said.

Miles looked startled. "It's all right, considering the state of the economy."

"The way I understand it, it's terrible, what with the energy crisis. Hardly enough profit for one person, much less a partner."

Miles laughed again. "Are you suggesting that I killed Monroe because business is bad?"

"In effect, yes. Under the partnership agreement, the business is now yours. A hundred per cent is better than fifty."

"That's the craziest thing I ever heard!"

"Not so crazy. Could Mr. Wilson have been thinking of breaking up the partnership? Did he say anything along those lines to you, Counselor?"

"Well . . ." The attorney drew back from Miles with a fastidious shudder. "Monroe did ask me, without going into details, to explore the legal aspects of severing such a partnership."

"You knew that, Mr. Miles, and you had to act," Sam said. "And you made one mistake. The room and the .45 were left without identifiable fingerprints. But you forgot one thing . . . When fired, a .45 such as the one by the body ejects the shell. You must have picked it up, then inadvertently dropped it, leaving it behind. The police found your prints on it . . ."

"They couldn't have!" Miles leaped to his feet. "I threw it in the river . . ." He broke off, face going ashen.

"Yeah." Sam smiled gently. "Sergeant?"

Sergeant Marsh took the subdued Ted miles into custody, reading him his rights.

A SHORT TIME LATER, SAM AND SERGEANT MARSH STOOD IN the doorway of the shop and watched a squad car speed away with Ted Miles.

"Sam, would that shell have left prints . . . *if* we had found it?"

Sam drew on his cigar, grinning. "Highly doubtful. But then he couldn't be sure about that, could he? It wasn't found on the premises, so I concluded that he had picked it up."

"Sam . . ." The sergeant hesitated. "Do you mind a personal question?"

"Shoot."

"Well . . . Nobody down at the station seems to know. What happened to you? I mean . . ." He gestured.

"The legs ? I'm paralyzed from the waist down, Sergeant. Have been for ten years. The reason? I was shot, with a Saturday night special. On the streets of New York. A mugger, who panicked when I closed with him."

"Shot?" The sergeant registered astonishment. "Then why in God's name are you in this business, Sam? It doesn't fit!"

"To my way of thinking, it does. Guns are a fact of life, they'll be with us a long time, despite all efforts to the contrary." Sam blew smoke, face grim. "Here, I'm in contact all the time with people who own guns. Those who think they have a legitimate reason for possessing one. You should hear some of my lectures, lectures to my customers on how to handle and take care of a weapon. If I manage to save even one life now and then, it fits, Sergeant, it fits." ●

SPIES AT WORK IN THE FROZEN WILDERNESS!!

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ARE THEY AFTER?

WHAT DIABOLIC PLOT
ARE THEY HATCHING?

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*She was guilty of murder, there was no doubt of it.
The problem was proving it!*

The Salad Lady

by JERRY JACOBSON

THE COUNTY'S DEPUTY CORONER, CHARLIE BROADNAX, A fine physician but an irrepressible black humorist, left word at Alley's desk that he wanted to see him when Alley got back from lunch. Dutifully, Alley retraced his steps to the elevator, rode it down to the sub-basement. It didn't do any good to telephone. The Coroner's Unit had only two lines and they were continually busy, and putting in a personal appearance there could generally shave a half-hour off the waiting time. The tunnel leading to the Coroner's Unit ran thirty feet beneath the world of the living, from the Public Safety Building across Prefontaine Street to the County Courthouse. The blowers whined continually, sucking up stale air and the trail of bare, sixty-watt overhead light bulbs made the trip seem a bit like strolling through the belly of a whale whose food was not being properly digested. Alley always moved through it at a pretty good clip.

He found Broadnax alone in his shoe-box office, applying the last touches to a tuna sandwich and a diet soda. In the unit's well-lighted work area, two of his assistants were hunched before microscopes, methodically pondering chemical analyses or hair strands or whatever molecular madness Broadnax had ordered for the afternoon. But the room's four stainless steel surgical tables were empty, by virtue of the fact that there had not been a suspicious or violent death in the county in over three days. Alley always suspected there to be a pile of bodies down here at all hours and since he never kept himself all that up to date on the cases of other homicide detectives, the occasional zero workload always surprised him.

"You should have called, Alley," Charlie Broadnax told him as Alley came into the office. "It's lunchtime and nobody's bought the farm in over seventy-two hours. The last stiff, in fact, was yours. The *Herald-Post* book critic fellow."

"That's the one I wanted to talk with you about."

"Well, you shoulda phoned. Coulda wrapped that stiff up for you in two seconds."

"I like the smell of formaldehyde," Alley told him.

"Suit yourself. On the one hand, it's a cheap high, on the other it's just so much lousy-smelling chemical to wash out of your hide. You want to know about the chem-anal on your stiff, right?"

Alley nodded as Broadnax wolfed down the last of his tuna salad.

"Food poisoning," pronounced Broadnax in a tone indicating that would be the final word on his determination. "Now, that hasn't been the most bizarre or intriguing analysis to come strolling down my pike. But *what sort of food?* Now, the matter begins to display more wrinkles than an elephant's prayer mat. Toxic substances. I tell you, Alley, they're more fun to work with than magician rings."

"So this John Smithrud was done in by what he ate?"

"You get your Bibles stacked, Lieutenant, and I'll swear to it on them."

"And the toxic substance?" said Alley.

"Marvelous little wrinkle there," said Broadnax, with all the glee of a sadistically scientific child who has just discovered the aeronautical truth that flies cannot achieve flight without wings. "The matter had us a little stymied in the beginning, but precedence has a foul habit of doing that at times. But calm heads prevailed and we shot off a fluid sample of the deceased to a Purdue research chemist, an old buddy of mine who never takes no for an answer. Not only is he a fine toxicologist, he's a dogged purist in the bargain, a man who accepts probability as absolute failure."

"The substance," said Alley, pulling Broadnax back onto the main trail.

"Toxic properties are tricky, Alley," Broadnax went on theatrically, ever the loquacious don of this subterranean sect whose work had always been both the gruesomely admired and instinctively abhorred by the entire department. "Some, once compounded with others, never again reveal their original identities again. Others, borne seemingly from thin air, remain nameless quasi-elements for all time, ghost toxins adrift in a chemist's world."

THE LIEUTENANT HAD LONG BEEN AWARE OF THE DISTINCTIVE scientific gulf between pures and applieds. The applieds, scien-

tists who banked huge corporate consultant fees, transposed science into the world's practical gadgetry. Pures like Broadnax, the sub-basement lab scientists who seemed seldom to bathe or change their clothes and ran around yelling "Eureka!" when there was absolutely no one around to hear, were satisfied with mere theorizing, concoction and discovery. The only true luxury they enjoyed was being able to say they were absolutely in on the ground floor. And the luxury of rambling discourse and philosophy. Pures told you what it was and what it might be ethically good for; appliends wanted to know how cheaply it could be made into something useful and what it could be sold for.

So Alley did not interrupt further until Broadnax seemed to have emptied himself of toxic philosophy, then asked Broadnax, "So, do we have any sort of clue to the identity of *this particular* toxin?"

Broadnax dipped his head a bit to peer over the tops of a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. "Alas, not specifically, no. But I can tell you what the food source may have been."

"I'd be most eager to learn that," said Alley.

"Water hemlock," Broadnax told him. "One of the most deadly of the poisonous wild plants. An ounce or two can knock out a roomful of mice in nothing flat. A hefty lunch of it can drop a horse dead where he sits. And a *plateful* — and this would seem to suit your purposes, Lieutenant — a plateful can very nicely turn a living human into an utter corpse."

"So I have a murderess on my hands."

Broadnax smiled wryly. "But you may never be able to prove that fact in a court of law. You see, Lieutenant, water hemlock just happens to be the virtual spitting image of wild parsnips. So you have your probable scenario. Your authoress, this Amanda Sayles, aged authority on the stalking and preparing of wild veggies and the like, is the victim of a damaging review of her latest book by the deceased." Broadnax waited for Alley's mouth to drop open at that last remark and when it properly did, he continued, "Ah, I sense your investigation hasn't moved along that far yet. It's true. *Herald-Post* Sunday Books and Brunch Section, three weeks ago. The review of Ms. Sayles' book was, as I recall it, rife with damage and ridicule."

"Three weeks ago, you say," repeated Alley as he jotted down a note of it for reference.

Broadnax nodded. "As it develops, your motive and opportunity seem to have coincided nicely here. Amanda Sayles likely knew of the differences between water hemlock and wild parsnips and, alas, poor John Smithrud, late of the *Herald-Post*, didn't."

"And that's something else I won't be able to prove, either."

"Does a centipede wear out a lot of shoes, Lieutenant?" said Broad-

nax as he rose and slipped back into his work smock for the afternoon's work.

THE ISSUE OF THE *HERALD-POST* IN QUESTION DID INDEED contain John Smithrud's review of Amanda Sayles' book, *Fast Food From the Wilds*. At once Alley identified the review as motive enough for a dozen murders. Smithrud, among other point-blank indictments, more than suggested the book was less the product of art and more the product of a close relationship between Amanda Sayles and the publisher of Dart Books, Inc., septagenarian August Dart. Alley read the review's concluding paragraph from typewriter keys double-dipped in venom.

"The book's authoress, while she has been a noted authority on the stalking and preparation of wild greens for over three decades, nevertheless offers up pitifully little in the way of new recipes or new path-breaking wild edibles. And while the book's elaborate, full-page color photographs are appealing and serve as an adequate guide to wild plant identification, you'll be paying for it in the bookstores. The volume sells for a whopping and over-priced \$19.95. And for that extravagant fee, the reader will discover a cornucopia of recipes he's concocted a hundred times before — water cress, wild cranberry dishes, wild spinach (Lamb's Quarter), wild cucumber and celery recipes, and lichen meals void of fresh twists. More is decidedly the pity for Ms. Sayles book, a volume at its best and most useful when it reposes on a coffeetable and at its worst and least utilitarian when it's taken into the kitchen."

Alley didn't read many book reviews, but for unqualified abuse this one ranked well above those he'd sampled. To learn how much damage John Smithrud's lethal typewriter had done in the marketplace, he phoned several local bookstores to learn how Amanda Sayles cookbook was selling. Three told his sales were tepid, two informed him sales were non-existent and one said all their copies had been returned to the publisher. Many of the city's health food stores indicated to Alley they were continuing to stock the book out of deference and respect for a long-standing local authoress, sales of it were sporadic. All of this negativity served to tell Alley that the book would recover its publication costs only by virtue of the fact that cooking was timeless and coffeetable display a perpetual vanity.

ON A SUBSEQUENT SUNNY WEEKDAY MORNING LT. ALLEY made his resolute visit to the wilderness home of Amanda Sayles, his second visit after his initial crime-scene investigation one week before. As he guided the unmarked police sedan up into the foothills above

town, he told himself that while this visit would be resolute and relentless, it well might be his last. He saw no conceivable way the aging Ms. Sayles could be tricked into confessing she had, with malice and premeditation, poisoned John Smithrud. The facts, as they existed in the case, were not the elements of which evidence was made. Alley had no clues, no witnesses to a crime and no weapons but the mistakable water hemlock which had been on the menu for only a single diner. If the day held any promise for Alley, then it had sought out the perfect hiding place.

The Mariposa Foothills had been misnamed by Spaniards in the early 1800's, since this twelve-mile belt of wilderness bloomed with no liliaceous plants of any type. In its absence stood scrub pine, Scotch broom, berry patches steadily on the march, and the hundreds of wild, untamed edibles of which Amanda Sayles had been writing these many years. The far-flung homes were refuges for recluses and rebels alike, dope-growers and hippies, revolutionary communes and religious sects, hand-to-mouth farmers and down-and-out homesteaders trapped in the time-warp of another era.

The home of Amanda Sayles was one of these, a sprawling bungalow being choked on all sides by a jungle of plants and bushes and vines. The walk leading from the earthen road to the front porch was pinched by high, unruly hedges Alley could not see through or over, but small animals and birds could be heard in them, fidgeting and on the scurry at his approach. He depressed the small button of the doorbell and felt a small charge of electricity pulse on the tip of his index finger, though the bell made no sound that he could hear. A gap of silence fell and Alley was filled with the same feeling he had known years before when he'd been a process server and, armed with a subpoena or a writ, sensed that behind the door someone was making a swift decision to answer or to pretend no one was at home.

ON THIS OCCASION, THE OCCUPANT CHOSE TO BE AT HOME. The tanned, leathery face resembled a walnut shell with icy blue eyes and the white hair hung in thin tangles like unnested albino snakes.

"Pine nuts," said Amanda Sayles as she extended a palm wherein were cradled a pile of hard-looking nuts. "The seeds from inside the pine cone. Excellent nourishment."

Not to appear a rude guest, Alley took a few and put them in a pocket. "I'll save them for later."

"I know your face from somewhere, young man," said the woman.

"From last week, Ms. Sayles," Alley told her. "The investigation into the death of John Smithrud."

"Ah, yes. Lieutenant Street, wasn't it?"

"Alley, Ms. Sayles."

"Alley, Street, Lane, Boulevard, whatever. Please. Come inside."

Alley once again made himself familiar with the livingroom's miscellaneous charm and artistic tumult: the braided rugs, the pine furniture, rosewood elephant heads, over-bloated velvetine sofas, an elegant Spanish trestle table in the dining room. He took a seat on one of the sofas (Amanda Sayles, choosing perhaps to maintain some distance between them, arranged herself in an ancient cane-back rocker some fifteen feet away) and brought out his notebook.

"More questions, Lt. Lane?"

"Lieutenant Alley, Ms. Sayles. The follow-up interview."

"Is that the normal procedure?" the woman asked.

Alley nodded. "Always. Preliminary interview, follow-up interview."

Amanda Sayles' bushy, gray eye-brows did a brief dance. "Oh, yes. You're no doubt checking for inconsistencies. If a person's statements are altered from the original, that would tend to indicate he or she was lying, would it not, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, Ms. Sayles, it *would* tend to indicate that. But a follow-up interview is also conducted to elicit additional information from a witness."

"Or a suspect," added Amanda Sayles as a foxy grin turned the corners of her lips.

Alley turned to a fresh page in his notebook. "Ms. Sayles, were you aware that your book, *Fast Foods From the Wilds* had been reviewed by John Smithrud in the *Herald-Post*?"

"I never pay much attention to book reviews, Lt. Lane. They are never objective in the absolute and that tends to lead to prejudice, subjectivism, ax-grinding, a whole host of misleading and inaccurate criticism."

"Smithrud's review of your book was not favorable," Alley said.

"There, you see? My point exactly. I never trouble myself over poor reviews. They have proven to have little effect on the marketplace."

"Ms. Sayles, I made it a point to check several bookstores on that very point. The sales of your book have drawn nearly to a standstill."

"Lieutenant Street . . ."

"It's Alley, the name is Alley . . ."

"Lieutenant Alley, yes. Lieutenant, cookbooks tend to enjoy long shelf lives. They are not subject to the vicissitudes of trends and topicality. So while sales may appear not to be brisk at any one point, they still strike good sales in the cumulative sense."

"So let's sum up here, Ms. Sayles. You never read John Smithrud's review of your book and aren't in a state of panic that your book isn't

exactly flying from the shelves, so you had utterly no reason to want Mr. Smithrud dead."

"Utterly, Lt. Street. I wouldn't hold an unfavorable review against anyone. Reviewers and critics don't have the public influence they would like you to believe they have."

Alley nodded. He had given up trying to correct her on his name. Obviously the woman was forgetful and there wasn't much he could do to re-charge her memory short of slapping a name-tag onto his breast pocket.

"I wonder, Ms. Sayles. Can we go out back where you and Mr. Smithrud had your lunch that day?"

The woman's brows furrowed in mock suspicion. "Ah, the scene of the crime, Lt. Lane. The *suspected* scene of the crime."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Certainly, Lieutenant. If you'll just come this way."

THE MASSIVE, UNDULATING BACKYARD OF AMANDA SAYLES appeared at first glance to Alley to be unchanged from his initial visit. The well-manicured lawn ran a full fifty yards out from the house. A marble fountain of sculptured birds spouted streams of water and Alley saw the rough-wood picnic table where John Smithrud had taken his last meal. The jungle of wild foliage began abruptly at the perimeters of the lawn, Amanda Sayles' open storehouse of edibles.

Amanda Sayles had wandered off to gather a handful of harvest. She was back in a minute.

"Red clover, Lt. Street. The flowers can be eaten raw. Wonderful snacks. The roots may be dried and smoked just as Indians did two hundred years ago."

Alley took one and popped it into his mouth absently. He was staring out at what appeared to be two separate patches which were barren of growth.

"Ms. Sayles, you've been doing some wholesale harvesting since I was here last."

Once more the detective caught the sly grin appear and vanish from the old woman's pale lips. "Water hemlock and wild parsnips, Lt. Lane. Both tend to resist a gardener's best efforts to control and cultivate them. I felt it was prudent to eliminate those growths completely."

"I see."

"I have quite a nice abundance of *Nasturtium officinale* in that general area. Water cress. The well-to-do like it as an accompaniment to those snooty little sandwiches they make with the crust snipped off. I like water cress in soup, with wild lettuce, willow buds and wild

celery. I prefer nourishment to the anemic bridge-club luncheon."

The two patches through which Ms. Sayles' shovel and spade had cut such wide swaths were set so far apart, it made mistaking one for the other ludicrous.

But Amanda Sayles had a ready answer for that.

"Lieutenant Street, even a professional stalker of wild greens such as myself can very easily mistake water hemlock for wild parsnips and vice-versa. Poor, unfortunate Mr. Smithrud's death was merely the luck of the draw. Because it can't be proved any other way."

It was too discouraging here. Amanda Sayles had thought of everything to cover up her crime and so now, standing here in this clueless yard seemed as pointless as lingering on a dance floor when the band was packed and halfway to the next town.

Alley suggested they go back into the house, specifically, the kitchen.

"Splendid idea, Lt. Lane," said Amanda Sayles in a jolly voice. "We'll have some fine dandelion tea. Out of the same pot. In case you tend toward suspicion still."

THE KITCHEN WAS OUTFITTED WITH A RESTAURANT-SIZE maple block table and a steel utensils rack hung above it on chains affixed to the ceiling. But the range and sink were old and dilapidated. Garlic cloves and vines of drying spices dangled down everywhere. An aged apothecary cabinet was cluttered with vintage blue Mason jars containing exotic staples and condiments. The littered room bespoke that this was the place where Amanda Sayles spent the greatest part of her waking life. And where she had concocted, mixed and cooked John Smithrud's lethal entree of water hemlock with vengeful care.

"The teapot, the teapot," she mused, an index finger placed along one side of her nose, the better to facilitate her failing memory. "Lieutenant Lane, what sort of cutlery do you have?"

"Knives and forks, you mean?"

"I mean *kitchen cutlery*, Lieutenant. The cook's arsenal. Always German cutlery, Lieutenant. Ruhr steel, nothing as formidable on the face of the earth. Mine are from the J.A. Hinckles Twin Works in Solingen, Germany. Forged steel, two-inches wide and balanced to the surgical degree where they virtually eliminate butcher's fatigue. Teapot, teapot . . ."

Alley wasn't in the mood for dandelion tea, or wild strawberries with cream, or cattails ala king. His investigation had reached the ultimate deadend and he was now willing to admit it.

"Ms. Sayles," he told the woman, wearily and with a trace of defeat, "I think I'll have that dandelion tea another time."

"No tea? But it takes only a moment to brew and steep."

"Another time."

"Pity, Lieutenant. The press of other matters? Other cases? Yes, I suspect so. A homicide detective would be wise to pursue those homicides which exhibit the greatest promise."

"Ms. Sayles, we pursue *all* homicides," Alley told her, the irritation of frustration and impasse showing clearly in his tone.

"Ah, but some reach conclusion and some do not. So much depends on the evidence and the clues. So much hinges upon fact and the hard realities by which one is confronted."

"Yes, Ms. Sayles, it is impossible for a detective to turn his back on reality. A prosecuting attorney wants evidence enough to assure a reasonable chance that the suspect will be convicted of his crime. Tax-payers may not bristle over time spent on a case. But they have a nasty habit of growing angry over money wasted on an unsuccessful prosecution."

"Let me show you to the front door, Lt. Street."

"No, I can find my own way out, Ms. Sayles."

"As you wish, Lieutenant."

"Before I go, one thing," said Alley.

"Yes?"

"Off the record, just between the two of us, with no other human ears present to listen, you murdered him, didn't you? Very calmly, with malice and forethought, you fed John Smithrud that plateful of water hemlock and then sat calmly across from him at that picnic table in the afternoon sun and watched him die."

"Lieutenant Lane," said the woman very slowly, as though she were practicing her best courtroom English on the witness stand, while a jury of her peers listened intently, "*that* would constitute an admission of guilt. And *that*, — on or off the record, I will never do."

"No, I thought not, Ms. Sayles."

PREDICTABLY, ALLEY'S RIDE FROM THE MARIPOSA FOOT-hills back down to the city seemed longer than the ride up. He dropped in on Charlie Broadnax again, his last straw to convict a killer. Apologetically, the medical examiner told him not to expect anything new, toxicologically speaking. His advice to Alley was to take his lumps on this one, admit that an occasional murderer slipped scott-free through the evidential network and to move on to more fertile ground.

Back at his desk in Homicide Division, all the lengthening shadows in the room told him another working day was drawing to a close. A Detective Third named Stratton, a spindlelegged kid and all-confer-

ence basketball star fresh out of college, sat at his desk thumbing through files of Unsolveds and perhaps wondering why he had been assigned to Homicide Division when there was no stacked backlog of dead bodies.

Alley had it in mind to tell the young detective to take the rest of the afternoon off and treat himself to it when a second thought crowded into his consciousness and began to vie for his attention. An image of garbage cans. Slowly the image grew firm and clear. What his mind's eye saw was an uneven rank of three, stainless steel garbage cans set on a square of concrete at the rear of a house. And then, like a camera on dollies, his mind's eye drew back, giving him an ever widening view of the house, until the image revealed to him the rear of the house of Amanda Sayles. But why garbage cans? Garbage cans filled to overflowing? Garbage cans filled to overflowing because their contents had not yet been collected?

Very well, so his subconscious mind had chosen to retrieve an image from his recent past, an image of which it thought Alley should be more aware. But why garbage cans? And garbage in profusive abundance that had not been collected?

And then, as though some unseen hand above him had decided to toss down a thousand puzzle pieces each falling precisely into place to put Alley out of his misery and shame, he had it. He had it all.

"Stratton?"

"Yeh, Lieutenant?"

"How often does the garbage get picked up in the Mariposa Foothills?"

"Say what?"

"The garbage collection in the foothills. How often?"

"Lemme see. That's county. Once every two weeks. City is once a week, county is once every other week."

Was a warrant needed to paw through someone's garbage? Alley had never been detailed to scavenge, but he didn't think so. Garbage cans and dumpsters were places of fair evidence all around. Quickly, Alley jotted down the address of Amanda Sayles, got up, walked past two desks and handed the address to Stratton.

"Know where this is, Stratton?"

The detective read the address. "Sure. Hippie Gulch. What's up?"

"You're up," Alley told him. "Get yourself two uniforms and pay the place a visit. The garbage cans are around back. There's still two more hours of daylight, but take some flashlights along just in case."

"What are we looking for?"

In detail, Alley told him.

"That's all you want?"

"That's all," Alley told him.

"And you want us to keep looking until we find it? All night?"

"Or until you're certain it isn't there," Alley told him.

"And if we find it?"

"Call me here."

"And if we *don't find it*?"

"Call me here. In either event. But treat this seriously. I don't want you or those uniforms throwing garbage around like it was a fraternity food-fight. This is still a homicide investigation. Now collect your two uniforms and hit the road."

IT WAS NOT UNTIL STRATTON HAD BEEN GONE FROM THE building a full hour that Alley had all the finer points ordered in his mind. What he had in summary was still nothing more than a crapshoot, but he reminded himself he had far less before an hour ago. If Amanda Sayles was to drive him into the last ditch, then he would go down firing, fighting and slinging mudballs with his last ounce of strength.

At seven-thirty, as dusk gave way to darkness, Alley found himself alone in Homicide. Scarelli and Polk were due in at eight o'clock, but for now there was just the quietude, Alley and a resident rat named Gulliver who had not been seen by anyone in weeks. He thought, still, of Amanda Sayles, his sly nemesis. In her approaching senility and her building forgetfulness, had she made that one tragic error? It was the water hemlock and the wild parsnips, of course. If anything would do her in, it would be these. They had to have been cooked up in separate skillets to be tended and simmered and watched with diligence, with tremendous diligence where a woman of advancing age was concerned. And did therein lay her flaw?

Eight o'clock came and passed. Scarelli and Polk appeared for their shift, perhaps wondering at Alley's slumped presence in the near total darkness at the back of the room, but not saying a word.

And then, at eight-ten, Alley's phone rang. *She couldn't even keep his name straight in her mind*, he thought as he reached for the receiver and snatched it up. *A name he had repeated to her a dozen times in correction.*

"Homicide Division. Lt. Alley."

"Stratton, Lieutenant. I think I got something for you."

"That's why you were sent out there," Alley said in a terse tone.

"The old woman was getting in our way a lot," Stratton said at the other end of the line. "I mean, it was really queer. At first, when we turned up, she was the sweetest little thing you ever saw. Very gracious and accommodating. Showed us around back, asked if we wanted

dandelion tea, hauled out the organic cookies, the works. But then, when we started in on the garbage, something must have clicked in her head and she went wild. I finally had to put one of the uniforms on her to restrain her and keep her away from the kitchen knives and the garden shovels."

She remembered, Alley said to himself. Finally but alas too late, she remembered.

"We finally found it near the bottom of the third can, Lieutenant," Stratton was telling Alley. "Isn't that always the way. What you're looking for always turns up in the last place you look."

"Yes, that's always the way. So be specific and tell me what you've got."

"It's a handwritten note. Just like you said it might be. Shaky writing, like the writing of an older person. I asked Ms. Sayles if it was her handwriting, but she clammed up and just said she wanted to talk to her lawyer."

"And the content of the note, Stratton."

"The content?"

"What does the note say, Stratton?"

"Oh, it says pretty much what you said it would say, sir. I mean, if your hunch had been a nailhead, that thing would have been driven right to the board."

"Tell me," said Alley, restraining as much of his impatience as his anxiety would allow.

"It says," Stratton's voice spoke, " 'Right skillet parsnips, left skillet hemlock' ."



*She had already died once. Was it a crime to kill her
a second time?*

The Deaths of Lorna Garth

by TALMAGE POWELL

THE DEATHS OF LORNA GARTH OCCURRED ABOUT ONE YEAR apart. She died accidentally the first time. Her second death was by design.

I learned the facts when a man walked into my cramped office unannounced. At first glance, he was a prosperous businessman of about forty, well tailored and groomed, a brushing of gray in his hair.

"Are you Homicide Detective Lieutenant Steve Mace?" he asked.

I nodded. As he came into the glare of the overhead light my focus sharpened. Twenty years of police work sharpens certain instincts, and I didn't miss the details that marred the cool executive image. A haggardness lurked in his well-cut face; a tired, waxen pallor limned his jawline; his eyes were red from lack of sleep. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is Bayard Garth. I want to report a murder," he said. "I have killed my wife."

"I see." I pressed a button and the intercom on my desk squawked. "Tolliver," I said into the voice box, "will you step in here right away."

Garth stood fatalistically calm as I came around the desk and patted him down to see if he was carrying a weapon. He wasn't.

"Please sit down, Mr. Garth."

He slowly lowered himself onto the hard chair in front of my desk. At the same moment, Tolliver entered the office, heavy-set, ruddy, habitually rumped, a plainclothes detective.

"Detective William Tolliver will witness my statement of your rights, Mr. Garth," I said. "You have the right to remain silent, the

right . . .”

“Never mind!” he cut me off sharply. “I know the rigamarole, and it’s irrelevant. I’m here to make a voluntary statement. You may put the conversation on tape if you like. There’s no mystery or need for bureaucratic red tape. I killed Lorna, my wife.”

I returned to the old swivel chair behind my desk. “When did you kill her?”

“Sometime during the past eight hours.”

“Sometime?”

“I’m not sure of the exact moment Lorna died.” His voice was a brittle skin over feelings seeking to vent themselves, despair, regret, irritation, pain, an anger that had no place to direct itself. “You can find her body in the garage at our home, seven-forty-three Ackerly Boulevard.”

It was an affluent address, suggesting beautiful people immersed in the good life.

Tolliver snapped a nod at me, and went out. His tough, experienced wisdom would cover everything at seven-forty-three Ackerly quite capably.

GARTH LOOKED AT THE DOOR BRIEFLY AFTER IT HAD CLOSED behind Tolliver. A faint twinge went through Garth’s shoulders, his acceptance of his burning his last bridge behind him.

He turned to face me across the desk, drawing a breath. “You already have my name and address. I own a small factory, I’m a supplier of component parts to a large manufacturer of electronic devices. Lorna and I have no children. We have been married for eighteen years.”

“Good years?”

“Of course! If you’re looking for a motive in that direction, Lieutenant, forget it. It was a good marriage. They were . . . dream years.”

“Why did you kill her, Mr. Garth?”

“You’re getting ahead of me,” he flared. “You have to know what happened previously in order to understand the how and why. Can you hold the asinine questions and let me explain?”

“By all means.”

His cheekbones were chalky white: “You see, this is the second time that Lorna died. The first time was about a year ago. We were returning home one night from a brief trip to Florida.”

His dilated pupils were looking backward through a hole in time. “It was one of those drizzly, misty nights. We were about a dozen miles south of the city on the interstate, looking forward to a tall drink and the warmth of our home. Suddenly, in the opposite, southbound lanes,

a tractor-trailer swooped upon an old car that had no taillights. The truck driver hit his brakes, and the big rig jack-knifed on the slippery surface. Without warning the massive thing hurtled across the median. I hadn't even time to touch the brake pedal. The crash totalled our car, which was of no moment. It killed Lorna — which was of all the moment in the world."

He paused for a smothered breath. "Miraculously, I escaped with only minor bruises and contusions. Lorna suffered a fractured skull. Then she died of cardiac arrest in the ambulance. She was dead on arrival at the hospital."

A memory gnawed. The story had a facet that had brought more than routine coverage from the news media. Specialists comprising a trauma team had re-started Lorna Garth's heart, resurrected her, brought her back to life at the hospital.

"Lorna was in the hospital several weeks," Garth was saying, "first the hours in the emergency room facilities where the trauma team restored her to life, then the days in intensive care, and finally in a pleasant corner room from which she walked under her own power. Here . . ."

With a badly shaking hand he worried a tooled moroccan wallet from his pocket, flipped it open, and thrust it across the desktop.

I looked at the small picture of Lorna Garth, and was impressed. Even in wallet-sized, she had an attractive face in good, clean lines of bone structure impervious to age. Her large brown eyes were clear, direct, intelligent, expressive of empathy and sensitivity. Her dark hair was short cut, feathery.

Quite a woman, I thought. Quite an attractive couple in their happier days . . . least likely murderer and victim.

I HANDED THE WALLET ACROSS THE DESK, AND HE BROODED on the image of his wife's face. "To all that had added up to the person known as Lorna Garth," he murmured brokenly, "was added the experience of death and revival."

And, his statement insinuated, the aftermath, the effects of the experience had been complicated. Requiring a second death?

He pressed the wallet picture against his cheek for a moment before returning it to his pocket. I had the uncomfortable feeling of having invaded a privileged privacy. I said, somewhat asininely, "Death is the nightmare."

His eyes came up slowly. "Why do you say that?"

"Isn't it?"

"Not necessarily." He hesitated, sorting painful thoughts. "You've surely read accounts of people restored to life by trauma teams?"

"Of course," I said.

"Then you know what resurrected people have reported. They do not all go into the same hereafter. A few have no memory of the experience. Others descended to a dark threshold of a Gehenna-hades hell reserved for mortal sins. Then there are those who report a golden glory beyond the veil of death, a glimpse of a beauty, a heaven, beyond imagination or human description."

"And your wife was one of the latter?"

"Yes, certainly! As she described the experience, there was the instant of the tractor-trailer blotting out the sight of everything else. Horrible noise and terror filled the moment of impact. A flash of pain went through her. It was followed by a strange suspension, as if she were in a twilight zone wherein a clock was poised to tick and anything might happen when the pendulum fell. Then the first haze of light came stealing. It came warmly, ever more strongly, drawing her into a golden beauty. But . . . the rapture snapped away — in the moment the trauma team detected the first returning beat of her heart."

"Did she resent having been snatched back?"

"Subconsciously, yes, and yes again," Garth said. "Consciously, she picked up the threads of living. We are taught to abhor and dread death, even when we slaughter our generations senselessly on battle-fields. She felt duty bound to be grateful for having escaped the usual permanence of death. She went through the motions of being concerned with husband, home, friends. If she experienced small brooding moments it seemed a natural thing after what she'd been through, something that would work out in time. Her doctor said so, and I believed him."

"But there remained the subconscious woman," I said.

"And she was too strong to remain forever dormant." Garth looked over his shoulder as if he expected to see a person, thing, shadow. Slowly, his depthless dark eyes returned. "One day, a few weeks after Lorna came home, she blacked out. When she came out of the faint, she swallowed the entire contents of a bottle of sleeping pills. I wasn't home at the time. Fortunately the maid who comes in by the day needed to ask about some little chore. She went in and found Lorna in time to call an ambulance and save her life."

HE LOOKED AT HIS HANDS, LYING NOW SUPINELY ON HIS knees. "It was then that I learned about the excruciating headaches Lorna had been suffering in secret. The black out . . . the compulsion to suicide . . . I asked her if she would see a psychiatrist. It seemed better to have her do so voluntarily."

"It usually is," I said. "What was her reaction?"

"It seemed not to matter to her very much, one way or another, but if it would make me feel better, she would do so."

"Who did you call in?"

"Doctor T. D. Spurgeon. I was told he's the best in the city."

"Did he help her?"

"Temporarily," Garth said. "The headaches seemed to ease, for awhile. Then she blacked out again. And she tried it again. This time with a razor blade on her wrists . . . When she didn't come down to join me for dinner, I went up to her room. The bathroom door was latched. I kicked it in. There she lay . . . half across the tub . . . her pumping blood had splattered Rorschach blobs in red all over the tiles . . ."

He took out a handkerchief and scrubbed Rorschach images from his fingertips, his palms. "This time, Dr. Spurgeon put her in a sanitarium. She stayed there about three months. She seemed to make excellent progress. She was able to come home for a weekend. She did beautifully. Spurgeon's opinion was that she should return to familiar surroundings and activities as soon as it was safely possible as part of her cure. The weekends were extended, carefully weaning her into a resumption of normal life, while treatment of course continued. She had appointments at the sanitarium for periods of examination and assessment. She remained on a prescription chemo therapy. And I hired an R.N. to live in."

He seemed to discover the handkerchief in his hands and thrust it back in his pocket. "Yesterday, a member-guest golf tournament wound up at the country club. There was to be an awards dinner. Usual thing. Informal speeches filled with corny humor. Handing out of the trophies. Live music for dancing afterwards. Friends. Conviviality. Lorna looked forward to the occasion. So we gave the nurse the night off and were away to the dinner. Good spirits. Laughing, talking the little stuff of people with a long and good marriage. Our friends were delighted to see her. It was, all in all, the most enjoyable evening we'd had in a long time."

His voice sagged, but I sensed that he wasn't inviting a question. I waited.

"Lorna and I returned home shortly after midnight," he said. "She was quiet, pensive. I wondered if the evening had been too much. She put her head against the headrest as I drove home, and when I pulled in the garage, she didn't rouse. 'Lorna,' I said, touching her shoulder and thinking of the emptiness of the house with the nurse off for the night."

He shook his head in slow disbelief. "She didn't respond to my touch or voice. Another black-out. And sitting there, looking at the dimness of her, touching the coldness of her flesh, I admitted the obvious to

myself at last . . . that I and Lorna and Doctor Spurgeon and all of material science were dealing with a force against which we were powerless. I knew what Lorna would do when she came out of it. Once more she would try to kill herself, and it would go on and on, this prolonged, endless agony — until one day, following a black-out, she would succeed. She would commit suicide. So I got out of the car and left the motor running. I walked out of the garage and watched the door-closing mechanism seal her in there while the car manufactured deadly carbon monoxide."

He coughed, and wiped the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand. "I kept walking, Lieutenant. I walked all the way from Ackerly Boulevard to down town. I drank coffee in a greasy diner and walked the old streets until it was time to walk in here."

THUS FAR HE HAD SPOKEN OF THE RAVAGES THE PAST YEAR had made on his wife. He had failed to look at himself. The minutes of unburdening in this office had altered his surface. His eyes were pits darkened with madness; his face was a gray death mask.

"You left her in the sealed garage, unconscious, car engine running," I said. "You left her in an absolute death trap."

"No other choice remained," he said. "For her, death was a certainty, leaving only the question of what would follow. The heaven she'd glimpsed the first time she died? Or the stygian pit reserved for mortal sinners?"

He lifted his arm and speared a finger. His voice had the timber of distant thunder. "Why the hesitant look on your face, Lieutenant? Surely you understand? I loved her far too much to think of anything short of heaven for her. I refused to let Lorna die by her own hand. Suicide is self-murder. Murder is a mortal sin. In self-murder there is no chance for repentance. It would have damned her forever."

The phone on my desk buzzed. I picked it up, and Tolliver's gritty voice reached me from seven-forty-three Ackerly Boulevard. Tolliver's briefing was expertly succinct. He had found Lorna Garth's body. But not in the garage. After her husband had walked away, she'd stirred from her black-out and entered the house through the door that connected to the garage.

Already Lorna Garth had tried pills and razor blade. Her method on this third try had worked. Tolliver had found her in the basement where she'd hanged herself.

Her second experience with death . . . Heaven? Or hell?

I hung up quietly, thinking of ways to stall Bayard Garth. I wanted a couple of the men in the white coats standing by when I broke the news to him.

A life of crime certainly beat working for a living, but sometimes even the sweet nectar of success can be soured by a bitter pill!

Logical Alternative

by GARY ALEXANDER

MILES POWELL WAS AN ARTIST, PAINTER AND PRINTMAKER. He had made a precarious living at it for over half his fifty years. He had never been invited to exhibit his work at the Museum of Modern Art, nor had he been given a spread in *Time*. Powell had no such illusions of ageless talent. He was technically competent and had a flair for imitation which he often exercised, bordering on outright forgery.

He was the artistic equivalent of a literary hack, and he didn't give a damn who knew it. He had always accepted his limitations with good cheer, because the only logical alternative would have been to take a regular job. That, of course, was unthinkable.

Lately, though, Miles Powell had fallen onto hard times, quite unlike the halcyon days of his artistic youth.

In the fifties when he began, Jackson Pollack and abstract expressionism were his guiding beacons. For a solid year, Powell did nothing but lay large sheets of canvas on his studio floor, climb a ladder, and bombard them with droplets of leftover Dutch Boy. It always knocked him back on his heels when he sold one of the wretched things.

Later in the decade, when the more structured abstractions of Rothko and Motherwell came into prominence, he bought a beret and grew a beatnik goatee.

"Like, I agonized over this one," he would comment to prospective buyers. "It tore me up trying to define the negative space of this concept."

Always good for a quick sale.

The sixties were truly golden. Artistic trend stacked atop artistic trend, and one had to be quick to leap off one fad and jump aboard another. After Warhol and his Pop Art, his Campbell's Soup cans, Powell marched behind with Buicks, whirlpools, Ajax, Pepsi.

The money Rolled in.

Op Art followed: high-horsepower color, three-dimensional flip-flop, wild undulations of a flat surface created by the viewer's optic nerve. Powell hated doing them. He would stumble out of his studio seeing spots, but his dealer had advised him to work for vertigo.

Great for his cash flow.

Minimal are was Powell's favorite. His Minimalism consisted of huge pieces of unprimed, monochromatic canvas with one, two, but never more than three thin, intersecting stripes.

Powell turned them out like GM manufactured Vegas.

The seventies, however, were grim. Representational painting returned to fashion, although the galleries often sniffed at the form. Miles Powell became an artist-in-action, hunched over his easel in suburban shopping malls. He had his hair styled and wore polyester jumpsuits. He created an endless series of landscapes, seascapes, and still lifes.

BUT NOW, AS YET ANOTHER DECADE COMMENCED, POWELL could hardly bear to continue that way. He was having recurring and terrifying dreams about seagulls, meadows, and vases of plastic flowers. And rumors of a recession were cutting deeply into his sales volume too.

What next? He didn't know. No sensational new trends were in sight and the recent past was dead, beyond resurrection.

After a great deal of thought, he concluded that he must take another crack at gallery art, which had usually been more recession-resistant than shopping center schlock. He retreated to the turn of the century and extrapolated from the postimpressionist masters, drawing what he felt was the best of Renoir, Van Gogh, and Cezanne. He added what he hoped would be considered the *Special Miles Powell Touch*. He made the images more abstract, substituted certain mile pastel colors with hot hues. Then he called over his old dealer.

The dealer visited Powell's dusty, chaotic studio. He examined Powell's work thoughtfully, nodding, stroking his chin, chain-smoking.

"They're cute, Miles. Attractive."

Powell knew he was dead.

"That juxtaposition of color, of intensity. They look like they're radioactive."

Dead. "Well, why don't we go through some of my unsold inventory," Powell suggested. "Some of my old stuff. You probably haven't seen some of my better pieces."

"No good, Miles. The market is brutal these days. Either you go with a big name, someone who will attract the investment dollar, or you're simply no competitive. The smart money is jettisoning their stocks and bonds. They want sizable appreciation. Metals, diamonds, and in some cases, art."

"Which leaves me out of the picture," Powell commented sourly.

"You have a moderate local reputation, Miles, but as far as an investor is concerned, you're playing Triple-A ball. They want someone who hits .330 with the Yankees."

"Terrific analogy."

- "There's only one way, but it's rather extreme."

"Should I take notes?"

"You have to die."

"Great."

"Spectacularly, if possible. Go off the top of a building on a defective hang glider, dressed in a Superman costume, clutching a note between your teeth decrying the lot of the American artist, and I guarantee that in six months a Miles Powell original will go for an easy thousand."

"Mind if I pass?"

The dealer shrugged. "Suit yourself. You always have been rather conventional for an artist, Miles. But keep plugging away. I'm forever willing to look at your work."

POWELL BECAME DESPONDENT. INCOME NO LONGER matched expenses. He had three ex-wives who had lost patience with his drinking and his moods, and he lived in a state with oppressive alimony laws. Their lawyers had been sending him letters lately, written in the tone of attack dogs.

So when Jerry Mackey approached him with an obviously illegal proposition, Miles Powell listened. It was a logical alternative to starvation.

Mackey, his second ex-brother-in-law, was wiry and cynical, had long hair and a full beard, wore clothes a size too small. He operated a small, downtown antique shop that catered to young professionals.

Powell had never liked the little bastard. Powell was paunchy and florid, and had an inherent dislike for anyone who looked trim enough to peel off his slacks and run the Boston Marathon. If that wasn't enough, he suspected that Mackey had put Marjorie together with her grasping, highly-efficient attorney.

Mackey, who he hadn't seen in over a year, had dropped in un-

announced. They shook hands, then Mackey strolled about Powell's studio, perusing this and that.

"Brrrr," he said, clutching his elbows. "It's freezing in here. Did the gas company cut you off, Miles?"

"No," Powell lied. "My creative juices flow better when it's a bit nippy. Is this a social call?"

"I'm branching out into artwork, Miles," Mackey said, studying one of Powell's doomed Postimpressionist ripoffs. "Is there radium in that paint you used?"

"No," Powell snapped. "What's the point?"

"The young trendies around town are really getting into art, Miles. Art is appreciating much faster than the usual bric-a-brac I sell, and they're getting zinged by the galleries. They want to dive into it, Miles, and they want to do business with someone they can trust."

Powell gestured at a moldy corner that was stacked to the ceiling with paintings and prints. "Help yourself."

"Actually, Miles, while I'm basically interested in your skills, it's not precisely *your* pieces that interest me, if you catch my meaning."

Powell laughed. "Sure, Jerry. Come back in a week, and I'll have a facsimile of *Guernica* ready. You might have a little trouble convincing your clients, though, not to mention the law."

"Great, Miles, if you're going to make a joke of it, I'll be tailights down the road in two minutes. If you're not interested, somebody else will be. I just thought, us being sort of family and everything . . ."

Powell was interested, had considered blatant forgery more than once. Mimicry, after all, was his foremost artistic skill.

"Keep talking."

"I don't know much about art," Mackey said, "but the word is that a painting is awfully tricky to forge, and there are a bushel of experts around to nail you to a wall."

"True," Powell explained. "A painter's brushstrokes are as unique as his fingerprints, and if you copy something very old, you have real problems. You have to reproduce obsolete pigments, then age the completed painting."

"The way I figure it, Miles, is that prints may be easier. Silkscreens and lithographs. Especially modern stuff, where it's no hassle to match materials."

Powell agreed. "Absolutely. Paper and ink. A flat surface. Numbered and signed, and an artist's signature is no trouble to copy."

Mackey presented a Cheshire cat grin. "Just what I thought! And prints are what I'm after anyway. My Perrier-backgammon set couldn't begin to afford an original painting by a well-known artist, as much as they yearn to. A print, on the other hand, by a known master,

is in the range of every bimbo who walks through my door. They'll gobble them up on name familiarity alone, whether they personally like them or not. They'll slap them up on their simulated-wood-paneled rec room walls and hang lights over them. It'll go like this, 'I'm sure your trip to Aspen was exciting, Margo, but have you seen my latest Mark Tobey?' I know my trendies, Miles!"

"I'll think about it, Jerry."

"Fifty-fifty, Miles. Think about that," Mackey said at the door. "You pick the artist. It's in your hands. I'll take everything you do that cuts the mustard."

MACKEY WAS BARELY OUT OF SIGHT WHEN AN IDEA erupted. The antique dealer had triggered a white-hot core of latent larceny in Powell's subconscious, for a fully-formed plan burst free. He would not provide Mackey with an occasional counterfeit, he would deliver *volume*! He could not remember when he last enjoyed an original, creative thought.

Excitedly, he tore through disorganized piles of art books until he found *The Printmaking Genius of John Paul Hoover*. He had attended art school with Hoover, an obnoxious bore in Powell's opinion, who continually evangelized on the subject of artistic integrity. Hoover, before his disappearance ten years ago, was the only one in the class who had come close to "making it". The rest, like Powell, were either in the fringes of fine art or had gone commercial or had abandoned the field altogether.

But John Paul Hoover had *promise*. Everyone agreed to that, including *Newsweek* in a one-column article two weeks before Hoover vanished. The consensus was that Hoover had drowned in a swimming accident at the ocean. He loved the seashore and had taken a solitary trip there to relax and perhaps sketch a bit. After he was long overdue, only his car and belongings were found. The tides could have carried him halfway to Honolulu, the police said.

Powell paged through the plates. Most were wilkscreens, pastel silhouettes of landscapes and seascapes at dusk. Nice, Powell thought, but primitive, and certainly overrated. He recalled Hoover's maudlin fascination with sunsets.

After Hoover's presumed death, the price of his prints soared, as had his reputation. Powell's ex-dealer knew the marketplace, he thought cynically. Die and your heirs will martyr you all the way to the bank. But Hoover had no heirs, Powell knew. And a dead artist could not step forward to make accusations of fraud.

A bootleg print or two could pass, Powell surmised, but since they were numbered, there was always the risk the owner of the genuine

article would send up a flare. Not much money in piecemeal forgery either, Powell concluded, so why not an entire set of "undiscovered" Hoovers? He would not copy a Hoover, but instead make an entire run in the rudimentary Hoover style.

IT BOTHERED POWELL ONLY SLIGHTLY THAT HE CREATED the Hoovers with much more enthusiasm than he ever had doing a Miles Powell. Two days later he had completed a set of one hundred seaside silkscreens he entitled *Maritime Serenity*. He numbered them 1/100, 2/100, 3/100, and so forth, then signed Hoover's cramped initials to each print. He called Jerry Mackey.

Mackey was delighted. "Beautiful; man! Mass production!"

"Thanks," Powell said, "but let's ripen these things before you carry them out."

Powell yellowed the edges slightly with a heat lamp and roughed up the paper in areas that could be covered by matting or frames.

"I'm pricing these babies at a hundred per," Mackey bubbled. "I've already put out the word to some of my trendies that I stumbled upon them in a second-hand store underneath a pile of . . ."

Powell cut him off, suddenly considering the penalty for grand larceny. "Business is your end of it. I don't want to know any details. I've already destroyed the stencils and the test pieces, so I don't know anything about this."

"Sure, Miles."

"Until you bring back my share."

"Sure, Miles."

EVEN BOOZE DIDN'T ENTIRELY RELIEVE THE ANXIETY OF what he had done, but when Mackey showed up a week later, he brought the perfect tonic — five thousand dollars in cash.

Mackey's eyes were wide and he was on the verge of hyperventilation. "Sold out, Miles, and this fast! I had no idea . . . My trendies went crazy, thought they were screwing me because a gallery downtown is selling Hoovers for two-fifty a crack. One couple bought twenty of them. And they're begging for more. When can you get me another batch? I've been hinting around that I've got a ton more."

Powell's paranoia flared again. Humiliation. Jail. More lawyers toying with his life.

"Look, Jerry, let's not overkill this. Somebody is going to get suspicious. Hoover didn't work this fast when he was alive."

"One more batch, Miles. That's all. I promise. One more set of John Paul Hoover masterpieces," Mackey pleaded.

"Well, one more."

Mackey hugged him. "You're a gem, Miles! After that, we'll branch out with some other dead artist."

MACKEY HAD JUST PICKED UP A ONE-HUNDRED-AND-FIFTY print set of *Slumbering Solstice* by John Paul Hoover. Powell's ex-wives and their lawyers had been paid. His studio thermostat was set at a comfortable sixty-eight degrees. The wine he now sipped came in the smaller quart size; the bottles were dated and were capped with real corks. Powell was relaxed, almost serene. He browsed through a book he had checked out of the library, an art book with large color plates . . . *Their Talent Died Too Young*. Another volume awaited his inspection: *The Late Great Printmakers of the Twentieth Century*.

A man walked into his studio without knocking. He wore a raincoat and dark glasses, had more hair and whiskers than Jerry Mackey.

"Hey," Powell protested.

"Hello, Miles."

There was a vaguely familiar tenor in the voice. The man removed his sunglasses. The eyes were unmistakable. Lined with age and a little puffy, yes, but like fingerprints and brushstrokes, basically unchanged.

"Uh, Johnny," Powell stammered. "About half the art world is wondering, uh, they, we thought . . ."

"I know, Miles. Please calm down. Pour yourself more of that, and one for me if you would." Hoover said. "I am flesh and blood. I did not arise from the dead."

Powell filled a glass for Hoover and took a hard pull directly from the bottle.

"What have you been up to for ten years, Johnny?"

"Oh, a little of this, a little of that, in one place or another, using a variety of pseudonyms. Absolutely nothing to do with art, though. I haven't held a brush in my hand or cut a silkscreen stencil in ten years, Miles."

"May I ask why?"

"I was a fraud, Miles. That article in *Newsweek* was the proverbial camel's backbreaking straw. I had no more talent than you or many others in our class. I did have the ability to politick, though. I wheeled and dealed and ingratiated myself with a number of gallery owners and art patrons in town. They had connections in New York and elsewhere and if I'd stuck it out, I could have ridden their coattails from regional to national prominence. I was on the brink."

"So why didn't you?"

"Because I was nearly at the point of no longer being John Paul Hoover. I was a product. The speculators and dilettantes who had

stockpiled my works had every reason to push me to the top. The value of their holdings would multiply. So what did I, in a childish whim do to thwart them, to rub their noses in the sham they had manufactured? I 'died,' prices on John Paul Hoover paintings and prints tripled."

Powell empathized with Hoover, but he was also experiencing another severe rush of paranoia. Why had Hoover come to him?

"I'm flattered that you stepped out of your coffin on my doorstep, Johnny, but why me? Frankly, we were never that close."

"Very true, Miles, and you were always a puzzle to me. You squandered your talent, always looking for the easy way. I liked you, but I never respected you as a professional."

Powell, by now, was feeling too persecuted to be offended. "You didn't really answer my question, Johnny."

HOOVER TOOK THE BOTTLE FROM POWELL AND REFILLED HIS glass. "Being a non-person is difficult, Miles. Deprivation is routine. I could hardly accept a position at my real potential without blowing my cover. Luckily, however, I passed through the city just as 'my' *Maritime Serenity* was being shown. I have been unable to escape my weakness for museums, galleries, and any other establishments that display fine art. Naturally, I was surprised. I did a little research and quickly discovered that Mr. Mackey was loosely related to you. You always did handle color well, Miles. I'd be proud if those prints were my own."

"You didn't bring the police with you, Johnny. Or does that come later?"

Hoover laughed and refilled his glass again. "Heavens, no. I'm no mathematician, Miles, but I did figure how much you and your stooge cleared on *Maritime Serenity*. I've gone without most luxuries and some staples for a long, long time. I thought we might work together. If I turned you in, I would have to surface. I would have to answer embarrassing questions. If I, perish the thought, resumed my career, my stock would be seriously devalued. Questionable integrity and whatnot. No, Miles, I think you're on the right track. I think you've finally settled into your niche. I have no desire to roll up my sleeves and get my hands dirty, but I'm perfectly willing to serve as an advisor. I don't know what your arrangement is with Mr. Mackey but I'll leave it to you to erase him from the equation. With me aboard now as a full partner, I doubt if he would be satisfied with a diminished share of the take. And he's irrelevant, too. I still have connections in New York and elsewhere. We'll market lost Hoovers for awhile — even paintings, with which I'll help you in the area of brushstrokes and color — then move on."

Hoover snatched the *Their Talent Died Too Young* out of Powell's lap. He flipped the pages rapidly, nodding, smiling. "It'll be hard work, Miles, but ultimately rewarding. Mm, look at this Frenchman's work. Quasi-Max Ernst. Pure spectrum colors, three overlays, tops. A snap. So sorry about him and that maple tree on the outskirts of Rouen, but when one rides a motorcycle at speed, risks are assumed, aren't they? I hitchhiked through Chicago last year and there's a gallery owner there who would sell his soul for surrealistic prints with a long shelf-life."

Powell drained the bottle and put his corkscrew to another. The paranoia was descending on him in steady waves, like saturation bombing missions. Fear of the justice system was long gone, but there was the spectre of something much worse. John Paul Hoover had been well-organized and hard-working during his career. Hoover would drive, push, demand. Their enforced partnership would have the earmarks of a steady job.

Powell ran into the john and threw up.

CRASHING... SMASHING... DASHING DYNAMITE!

12 spine-shivering chapters of
thunderbolt action and amazing
adventure!



Would a mother blow off her own son's head? Of course not. But somebody made a mess out of Marvin Zipsky — and it was up to the police to find the killer!

MARVIN'S LETTER BOMB

by THOMAS MALONE

IT WAS A BULKY LETTER FROM MOM. At least that's what the return address said. But when Marvin Zipsky tried pulling the flap open, it blew the top of his head off.

"Messy!" Lieutenant Van Vleet said a few minutes later, poking at some bits of smoking wreckage with the toe of his big shoe. He and Sergeant Smeed were the first police on the scene. They had been eating lunch just around the corner at Harry's Open Pit when the bomb went off, and Van Vleet still had the remains of a tuna sandwich tucked in his coat pocket.

"Careful, Lieutenant, you're standing on some brains," Smeed warned his burly partner.

Van Vleet scuffed his shoes off on the sculptured carpeting and fished around in his pocket. "Know what this reminds me of?"

"I'll bite," said Smeed.

"The Dorfmann bombing. Just like this. Ten to one the guy's a vegetarian."

Smeed frowned and tried not to look at what was left of poor Marvin. He thought he was going to be sick.

Van Vleet, who still considered himself technically on his lunch hour, finished off the remains of his tuna on rye and was looking for something to wipe his hands on. He had finally settled on Marvin's shirt and was proceeding nicely when a beer can suddenly dropped from the ceiling and ricocheted off a leg of the coffee table. They both nearly jumped out of their socks, fearing another explosion any second.

It took them a while to realize what had happened. The blast that decapitated Marvin had punched a hole in the ceiling the size of a manhole cover, and upstairs, just beyond the shattered floorboards and broken plaster, they could see a man in a ripped t-shirt drinking beer while he watched cartoons on television. From the expression on his face — a face untouched by a razor in several days — he didn't look particularly upset by the large hole that had suddenly appeared in his livingroom floor. Happily he cracked open another beer. From where they stood, he seemed quite contented with the prospect, affording as it did a handy alternative for disposing of empties. They breathed a sigh of relief and grinned at each other sheepishly.

"I saw you jump," Smeed taunted.

"No you didn't," Van Vleet warned.

THEY WENT BACK TO WORK. A MINUTE OR SO LATER THEY heard the man upstairs belch and another can came rattling through the hole. But this one took an unexpected carom at the last second and hit Van Vleet on the head. Miraculously it stuck to the rim of his snap brim hat. Van Vleet's eyes suddenly went hollow as if he had been tapped on the head with a wrecking ball.

Oh, oh, Smeed thought. He knew this one meant trouble. If there was one thing Van Vleet couldn't stand, it was being hit on the head.

While Smeed watched with growing alarm, Van Vleet began to undergo a frightening metamorphosis. His already protuberant eyes popped out of his skull even more. His huge body began to quiver as the can rattled along the rim but refused to drop. Van Vleet seemed to actually expand in volume as the cords around his neck turned several hideous shades of purple. For a second Smeed feared he might actually explode. When his dimensions reached that of a large Coke machine, he suddenly cut loose with a bellow like a mortally wounded elephant. He followed this up with some highly dramatic gun-waving, an incredible ululating back flip that shook the whole building, and finished off with a string of threats so vile that even Smeed's hair began to curl.

By this time the hapless Looney Tunes aficionado upstairs was nowhere to be seen and Bugs Bunny was playing to an empty room.

"Couldn't do it again in a million years," Smeed said, snatching the beer can that had somehow stayed in place the whole time.

In a few minutes Van Vleet had stopped his fulminations, put his gun away, and shrunk back to normal size. He sighed heavily, then frowned as he considered the headless corpse and tacky apartment. "I still say it looks like the Dorfmann bombing."

Smeed shook his head. "Yeah, but motive. We won't run across another one like that in a while."

"Who's talkin' motive? I'm just saying it looks like the Dorfmann case to me."

DENNY AND LENNY DORFMANN HAD BEEN PUBLISHERS OF a militant vegetarian newsletter and had argued violently one evening over some missing asparagus spears that were to go in a souffle. Lenny accused Denny of giving them to a circus pin-head named Juanita, whom he had been trying to seduce with presents of linoleum and vegetables. Denny hotly denied the theft, and later smashed an Eskimo Pie on the back of Lenny's neck while he was watching Monday night football. This enraged Lenny who returned fire with a spinach salad, and a full scale battle erupted.

At some point in the melee Lenny lost a tooth. A little later he lost consciousness when Denny hit him between the eyes with a perfectly aimed Cuisinart machine. It was several hours before Lenny regained consciousness and found himself strapped to the exhaust-fan of an Italian restaurant — left there for dead by his brother.

Two weeks later, Denny was alone in his apartment defrosting some broccoli florets when they suddenly exploded in his face, decapitating him. They had been rigged with plastic explosives by Lenny, a former army demolitions expert in Viet-Nam. At his trial Lenny broke down and admitted everything, then promptly committed suicide by detonating two sticks of dynamite he had strapped to his chest. In the process he took with him his defense counsel, the judge, the prosecuting attorney, and an unidentified female with a very small head who was found wearing a sun dress made entirely out of swirled linoleum.

"Oh, oh!" Smeed said. He was in the corner crawling around on his hands and knees. "Take a look at this, Lieutenant!"

He stood up, holding a singed scrap of paper pinched between two fingers. Van Vleet came and looked over his shoulder as he read: "'Hope you get a bang out of this!' Signed, 'Your Mother, Mrs. Zipsky.'"

"Hmmm," Van Vleet said, his muddy eyes popping out of his head again.

LATER, BACK AT HEADQUARTERS, THE DEPARTMENT'S top-echelon thinkers rolled into high gear. They were led by the brilliant Major Horace Palderman, generally considered one of the top intellects on the force even though a cement truck had recently run over his forehead, and he was now usually seen listing to one side with long strings of saliva hanging from the corner of his mouth. Palderman was in a feisty mood today — his wife had inadvertently put his truss in the aquarium — and he was not about to be bamboozled by such a transparent and clumsy deception. He had read too many Raymond Chandler novels for that.

"It was a cruel hoax, Sergeant," Palderman explained gravely. "A forgery, intended to make him think it was from his mother. And when he opened it . . . KA-BLOOEY!" Palderman emphasized the decapitation by slapping himself violently on the forehead. Along with his drooling skills, Palderman had recently picked up the habit of emphasizing his speech with dramatic hand gestures. In this case, however, the effect was compromised by the fact he was holding a cream-filled cupcake in his hand at the time. Smeed was glad to hear what the official thinking was, none the less. He had suspected as much himself.

The F.B.I. had their own ideas about Marvin's death. They had been crawling all over Marvin's apartment because federal postal regulations had been violated. If there is one thing the Post Office likes to discourage, it is sending explosives through the mails — especially with postage due (fifteen cents in this case). The boys from the Bureau were the regular clean-cut, efficient types in three-piece suits, carrying attache cases, and trying hard to look steely-eyed. Smeed tried making conversation with them at first, but then gave it up. They weren't talking to ordinary cops.

IT WASN'T UNTIL THE NEXT DAY THAT HE AND VAN VLEET learned the F.B.I. had made an arrest within hours of the explosion. Eight hundred miles away they were giving an Arab melon vendor named Mohammed Abdul Salaam the grilling of his life. For two years he had been under investigation for a whole string of bombings. According to the report, his targets thus far had included several inmates at an old sailor's home, a Hamburger Helper factory, and a National League umpire.

In addition to being a cold blooded terrorist, he was thought to be the

leader of a crooked trucking syndicate trying to muscle its way into control of the lucrative mud-flap industry in New Jersey. Tenuous links had been established between him and Marvin — they both liked garbanzo beans and had the same hat size. Although how this figured into the murder equation not even the brilliant, listing Palderman could say.

INFORMING MARVIN'S MOTHER OF THE TRAGEDY FELL TO Smeed, and turned out to be a real problem. Mrs. Zipsky was Marvin's only surviving relative and had been stashed away in a nursing home somewhere. No one knew where. Unfortunately, none of the papers and letters in Marvin's apartment revealed the address. The one solid clue that could have told them had been blown up along with Marvin's frontal lobes.

The neighbors at the Kropotsky Apartments weren't much help either, since nobody ever talked to Marvin except under duress. As one neighbor explained it to Smeed, Marvin was probably the most odious assemblage of protoplasm since Vlad The Impaler.

Smeed didn't doubt it either after nearly coming to blows with the violent Ukranian living next door. The mere mention of Marvin's name was enough to drive the man into a frenzy. Otto Kobasniuk hated Marvin with a passion. Somehow, over the course of the last two years, Marvin had managed to burn Otto on the face with a waffle iron on three separate occasions. Because of Otto's excitable nature and broken English, Smeed never did find out how Marvin accomplished this astounding feat. Otto now went through life with a permanent grid pattern embossed on his face — a fact which did little to improve an already pathologically grumpy disposition.

Finally, an anonymous phone call in the middle of the night solved the problem for Smeed. He had to admit it was a piece of luck rather than any brilliant investigating techniques on his part, but then he wasn't looking any gift horses in the mouth either. It was a woman's voice and there was the sound of music in the background.

"Do you want to know where Marvin Zipsky's mother can be found?"

Smeed admitted that he did.

"Then listen carefully."

"I'm listening."

"Go to the Happy Clam Nursing Home, Two-twenty South Terminal Street. Do you know where that is?"

"Not offhand."

"Well, write this down then. Do you have a pencil?"

"Just a minute . . . Okay, go ahead."

She gave him the directions and he wrote it all down as quickly as he could on the cover of an old magazine.

"Thanks," Smeed said.

"Don't mention it. By the way, it's room one-nine-nine."

"Who is this anyway?"

"Never mind," the voice said, and hung up.

THE NEXT MORNING SMEED WENT TO THE HAPPY CLAM Nursing Home just as the tipster had directed. It was a featureless gray building set well back from the road on the top of a small hill. In the lobby an indifferent nurse directed him to a tiny room at the end of a long hallway that smelled of disinfectant.

He found her sitting on the edge of her bed reading a book titled, *Great Moments In Rhumba Dancing*. It was filled with glossy pictures, and the old woman seemed thoroughly absorbed in it. Smeed introduced himself and sat down on the chair next to the window, hoping he could somehow break it to her gently. She closed the book carefully and looked at him with a pair of soft brown eyes.

Smeed cleared his throat, tried to look sympathetic, and whispered, "Someone blew Marvin's head off."

"What?" she said. "Speak up! My batteries are down."

He repeated it for her a little louder this time. He had expected the old lady to fall apart, but she took it amazingly well. Mrs. Zipsky shrugged, looked wearily around the room and said, "So what?"

"I must admit, you're being very brave about this, Mrs. Zipsky."

"Thanks."

"You don't even seem very surprised."

She laughed suddenly. "No, I'm not surprised. Marvin was a rat."

"I beg your pardon."

"I said he was a rat. That's why I did it."

"Did what?"

"Blew him to smithereens. What did you think I meant?"

Smeed was a little shocked by this admission — especially in view of what top-echelon thinking was. "You mean you mailed your own son a bomb?"

"You betcha!"

"Come now, Mrs. Zipsky, I find that hard to believe."

"Don't patronize me, flatfoot. It's true. He was a rat. He brought me here and abandoned me like some old derelict, then drove off in my new Coupe DeVille. He told them I was senile because I liked to sleep in it."

Smeed was taking notes by now. "Wait a minute, why were you sleeping in your car?"

"Why not? It was nicer than the Kropotsky Apartments and that idiot Kobasniuk living next door. Lots of people sleep in their cars. Did you know that Mahatma Gandhi used to sleep in his car?"

"I didn't know that."

"It's true."

Mrs. Zipsky then went on to tell Smeed how she had managed to construct the bomb. She had sent away for everything. It had all been advertised in a magazine called, *Commando Monthly* a journal for mercenaries, assassins, international terrorists, and accountants with vicious streaks. It was published in Davenport, Iowa. Along with complete instructions for making a bomb, they had given her a free jar of black greasepaint for darkening her face while on dangerous jungle missions.

Smeed leafed through a copy while she explained some of the finer points of installing detonators. The lead article in this month's issue was, "Bludgeoning: Martial Arts Moldavian Style." According to its author, Metcalf "Bullets" Detweiler, bludgeoning was invented during the Middle Ages by Moldavian noblemen who were too poor to afford swords or metal weapons, but who still wanted to enjoy the thrill of mortal combat. Basically it consisted of beating each other to death with large pieces of lumber. It even gave a set of rules in case you wanted to try it out with some of your friends in your backyard.

Smeed put the magazine down and sighed heavily, "We can't let you get away with this, Mrs. Zipsky."

"I should hope not," she said, yawning.

"It's illegal you know."

"I know."

"You don't seem very worried."

"What can you do to me?"

"Well, it'll probably mean the slammer for you."

"I doubt it."

"You're in big trouble anyway. They won't let you live here anymore."

"Big deal," she said. She ignored Smeed after that and went back to her rhumba book.

MRS. ZIPSKY WAS DEFENDED BY RICHARD BOLANDER CLARK, Attorney at Law. Mr. Clark was young, successful, and arrogant enough to think most of his clients were morons — which they probably were. He didn't mind that they were morons though, because he knew

you could make a fortune figuring out the legal implications of all the blunders these morons committed. Not that he thought Mrs. Zipsky was a moron, particularly. He defended her for nothing. Richard Bolander Clark was no fool. He knew the value of publicity. And the Zipsky Bombing Case would certainly have that.

He hoped to get her off scot free, an accomplishment that would catapult him to the big leagues as far as trial lawyer in the state were concerned. His strategy was the classic legal defense — based entirely on bombast and chicanery. It was hampered by only one small detail. Mrs. Zipsky couldn't keep her mouth shut. She was obviously guilty, and cheerfully admitted it to anyone who asked her — and quite a few who didn't.

The trial itself had all the qualities of a three-ring circus. The district attorney strenuously objected when Mr. Clark attempted to bring in three acrobats, a juggler, and a talking dog to testify in Mrs. Zipsky's behalf.

The verdict was reached only after several mistrials and numerous threats of contempt against defense counsel: not guilty by reason of insanity.

Mrs. Zipsky took the insanity ruling philosophically. "Well, it's better than senility anyway," she told reporters as they whisked her away in the back of a station wagon.

In practical terms what the verdict meant for her was a change of address. The state directed she be removed from the quiet confines of the Happy Clam Nursing Home and thrust into the more volatile atmosphere of the state mental hospital five miles across town.

All this was just fine with Mrs. Zipsky too. She hated the Happy Clam anyway. Always had. Besides, Mrs. Zipsky knew a little something about the state mental hospital.

"I THINK IT'S DR. DIMAZZIO'S GROUP RHUMBA THÉRAPY SHE really likes," Smeed told Van Vleet back at headquarters. Smeed had become friends with Mrs. Zipsky during the course of all the trials and had gone to see her at her new home. "I guess before he was a doctor, DiMazzio won the world's rumba championships in Rio back in '39. Also I think she's getting emotionally involved with a Bulgarian who claims to be a millionaire ex-zeppelin pilot . . ."

At this point Van Vleet growled at him and returned to his coffee and newspaper. There was something there about an Arab melon vendor suing the F.B.I. for false arrest. ●

Saturday Afternoon at the Movies

If you were a kid in the early nineteen-forties, you went to the movies on Saturday afternoon.

You went in around twelve-thirty, and five or six hours later you staggered out into the fresh air and fading sunshine, your youthful body worn by innumerable Indian fights and stagecoach chases, battles with monsters from this and other planets, your ribs aching from laughing, your blood temporarily turned to raspberry sherbert by fright, your hair disheveled and filled with popcorn kernels — but overall with a wonderful warm glow of satisfaction filling every bone in your pre-teen body.

Saturday was movie matinee day. There was nothing else you wanted to do. There was nothing else you even thought of doing. No emergency was dire enough to keep you from those flickering images on the silver screen. ("What, have my tonsils out — on Saturday?").

Going to the movies was as natural and as inevitable as shooting marbles or hating school exams or playing kick-the-can or competing with other kids in



games of toe-knee-chest-nut using a two-bladed knife that could have skinned all the flesh from your nose but miraculously didn't. It was a sure a thing as the sun coming up each morning, as Lois Lane almost (but not quite!) discovering that Superman was really Clark Kent, or of I LOVE A MYSTERY's Jack, Doc and Reggie surviving attacks by the eerie female werewolf in the little town of Bury-Your-Dead, Arizona.

Your parents expected you to go to the movies on Saturday afternoon. Your friends demanded it. And most of all, you required it — physically, mentally, and emotionally — as much as you needed air to breathe, Big Little Books to read, and new chocolate flavored Ovaltine to drink.

At least that's the way it was if you were a boy. If you were a girl I don't know what you did, but I'm sure it wasn't half as interesting. Girls were in the dim, dark future. More important matters occupied you at the Saturday matinee.

Like a triple feature and a Flash Gordon serial and a couple of cartoons and a movie newsreel and maybe a Pete Smith short subject and coming attractions and a big box of popcorn (freshly popped and with REAL BUTTER!) and a swell door prize if your number was drawn out of a big barrel during intermission.

Ten cents never bought so much, and probably never will.

One of the features might be POW-DERSMOKE RANGE which starred, if not all the cowboy good guys known to boykind, at least enough to make it a superspectacular for the time — like Harry Carey, Hoot Gibson, Bob Steele, and Tom Tyler.

Or perhaps Gene Autry would ride his

Greatest Spy Action Serial Ever Made!

**SMASH SPIES WITH
THE SECRET SERVICE!**

Super-secret
Super-serial
Super-thrills!



**THE
SECRET
CODE**

Added

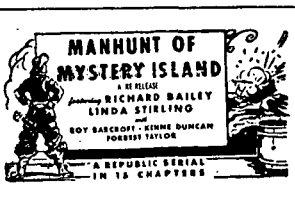
ATTRACTION!

"How To Code
And Decode
Secret Writ-
ings" ... by
Henry Lysing

**PAUL KELLY
ANNE NAGEL**

Directed by
Spencer G. Bennel

A COLUMBIA SERIAL (Reprint)



horse Champion up to the campfire, dismount, grab a guitar, and sing a few nasal choruses of "Mexicali Rose" to Smiley Burnette and the other cowpokes. (Actually, we didn't care much for his singing, but we tolerated it, knowing we couldn't have chases all the time. Besides, it gave you a chance to shoot your water pistol at the unsuspecting heads in front of you when the usher was in some other darkened corner of the theater, make a dash out to the lobby for a fresh bag of popcorn or crackerjacks, or race to the men's room before disaster and embarrassment struck.)

Gene wasn't the only one with musical habits. Roy Rogers also sang a lot. Not only that but Dale Evans was always there to lend her vocal chords to the melody. Worse yet, the Sons of the Pioneers were on hand, generally gathered around the standard campfire between back-lot chases after cattle rustlers and bank robbers.

(Why they never found out the bad guys in advance was somewhat of a mystery. I could have told them it was the ones with the black hats and the mustaches!)

The western stars in these B pictures were legion, and we knew every one of them. An army of them rode the cinematic plains before our enchanted eyes. There was Ken Maynard, Tim McCoy, Buck Jones, sometimes even a vintage Tom Mix, Rex Bell, Bill "Hopalong Cassidy" Boyd, Wild Bill Elliott, Randolph Scott, and Buster Crabbe.

A boy's best friend might have been his mother or his dog in those days, but a Western star's best friend was his horse. The horses were sometimes smarter than the real people, especially the villains,

ADVENTURE-STRIP HERO
COMES TO THE SCREEN
IN THE GREATEST OF ALL
ACTION THRILLS!

**SECRET
AGENT X-9**

13 CHAPTERS OF GIANTIC THRILLS!

with
**JAN WILEY
LLOYD BRIDGES
KEYE LUKE
VICTORIA HORNE
EDMUND COBB
SAMUEL S. HINDS**

Based Upon the Newspaper Feature Entitled
"Secret Agent X-9" Owned and Copyrighted
by King Features Syndicate Inc.


Screenplay by Joseph O'Donnell, Patricia Harper
Original Story by Joseph O'Donnell, Harold C. Wire
Directed by RAY TAYLOR and LEWIS D. COLLINS
Produced by MORGAN B. COX

A UNIVERSAL SERIAL

and were a heck of a lot better known. We might have recognized the villains by their scowling, evil faces, but we knew the horses by their names. Chief among these were Trigger, Champion, and Tony. Often, when the bad guys had gotten our hero in a bad fix, Roy (or Gene or Tom) would say: "Go on, boy, go get help!" and off the horse would gallop, legs flashing in the prairie sunlight, mane streaming in the wind, arriving back at the ranch or in front of the sheriff's office in time for somebody to say, "I think he's trying to tell us something."

It might have seemed that all the features were Westerns, but they weren't. There were comedies, too. Abbott and Costello played in such epics as **BUCK PRIVATES** (with the Andrews Sisters) **ONE NIGHT IN THE TROPICS**, **IN THE NAVY**, **KEEP THEM FLYING**, and **PARDON MY SARONG**. Sometimes we had one of the WC Fields classics, such as **THE BANK DICK**. Then there was the Ann Southern series, including **MAISIE GETS HER MAN** with Red Skelton. **HENRY ALDRICH** (starring Jimmy Lydon, who else?) showed up with his friend Homer. Bob Hope and Bing Crosby started hitting the **ROAD TO MOROCCO** and other exotic locales. We could depend on Mickey Rooney as **ANDY HARDY** to get some good advice from his father the judge. (We could've told him not to fool around with Anne Rutherford or Anita Louise. Girls were poison in those days!) And who could forget Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake as **BLONDIE** and Dagwood? And Larry Simms as **Baby Dumpling?** (Gasp! Choke!) It kind of brings a tear to your eye, doesn't it?

MIGHTIEST ADVENTURES!




THE INCOMPARABLE BATMAN and ROBIN
and **THE BOY WONDER**

Copyright 1938 by National Comics Publications, Inc.

Based on the well-known Batman Comic Magazine Feature appearing in "Detective Comics" and "Batman" Magazines

DOUBLE THE SERIAL THRILLS AND EXCITEMENT WITH THE WORLD'S GREATEST ADVENTURE TEAM!

A Columbia Serial Reprint



with
**ROBERT LOWERY • JOHN DUNCAN • JANE ADAMS
LYLE TALBOT • RALPH GRAVES**
Written for the Screen by
**GEORGE H. PLYMPTON, JOSEPH F. POLAND
and ROYAL K. COLE**
Directed by **SPENCER BENNET**
Produced by **SAM KATZMAN**

More to our liking, though, were the horror flicks put out by Monogram, Universal and other astute film-makers who knew what the popcorn-munching youth of America craved. We saw **THE LIVING GHOST**, with James Dunn and Joan Woodbury. (Is he Man or Zombie? asked the inquisitive lobby card out front, and we couldn't wait to find out.) Or how about Lon Chaney, Jr., as **THE WOLFMAN**, Bela Lugosi as **DRACULA**, and Boris Karloff as the immortal monster of **FRANKENSTEIN** and **THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN**. (He didn't make out too well as the prospective bridegroom, but once again, we could have told him that girls were nothing to mess around with. He probably wouldn't have listened anyway. Older people weren't nearly as smart in those days.)

All this was good solid cake upon which we feasted insatiably during the bulk of the afternoon. But it was really the icing that we all looked forward to — the movie serial that brought us thundering back week and week, Saturday after Saturday, into the huge, noisy, sweat-drenched, popcorn-smelling cavern that was our home away from home.

Ready? Hold onto to your seats, guys. Last Saturday, you remember, Flash Gordon was trapped in this tank, and the King of the Sharkmen was filling the tank with water. If that wasn't bad enough, henchmen of the evil and cunning Ming the Merciless, Emperor of the planet Mongo, had released into the tank an octopod — an octopus-like creature with a beak like a bird. If that wasn't bad enough, poor Dale Arden, Flash's girl friend, was forced to: a)

THE INVISIBLE GHOST!

Dick Tracy's toughest assignment... to find a murderous fiend he couldn't see... Tracy's most dangerous case in his greatest Serial.

DICK TRACY vs. PHANTOM EMPIRE

Formerly entitled **DICK TRACY VS. CRIME, INC.**

Based on a cartoon strip by **CHESTER GOULD**

A REPUBLIC
SERIAL
IN 15 CHAPTERS



Directed by **WILLIAM WITNEY** • **JOHN ENGLISH**

Associate Producer **W. J. O'SULLIVAN**

Original Screen Play By **RONALD DAVIDSON** • **NORMAN S. HALL**

WILLIAM LIVELY • **JOSEPH O'DONNELL** • **JOSEPH POLAND**

Republic Pictures Corporation — **Harbert J. Vane**, President



wear a clinging garment that barely covered her slim young female body; and b) submit to the lustful pawings and leers of the bad guys.

(Well, never mind about that. Flash was the one in trouble, right?)

After seeing a chapter like that, it was as though a magnet were pulling at you all week long, and the closer you got to the weekend, the greater became the strength of the magnet. On Saturday, at high noon, coin clutched firmly in hand, you joined the battalion of other boys marching eagerly toward the neighborhood theater where you would glue your anxious eyes to the flickering images to discover Flash escaping the clutches of the villain and almost certain death, only to fall into yet another trap from which there was surely no possible escape.

Until the following Saturday, that is.

The features were okay, but it was the movie serials that brought us back week after week. And there were lots of serials for us to follow — mystery, detective, sci-fi, jungle epics, etc. — something for every taste. Neophyte mystery fans thrilled to the exploits of Dick Tracy, The Shadow, Holt of the Secret Service, the Black Commando, the G-Men, and the Junior G-Men — and on and on and on. Sometimes you were given a card to be punched every Saturday, which when filled up allowed you to see the final chapter FREE!

And speaking of free things, your ten cents admission entitled you to drawings for door prizes, with the theater manager fishing tickets out of a big bowl while you sat hunched in your seat staring breathlessly at the ticket stub, hoping to win one of the swell gifts up there on the stage. I

AMERICA'S MOST POPULAR
HERO

... his long followed by
millions in newspaper front pages to read
NOW see his greatest screen adventure



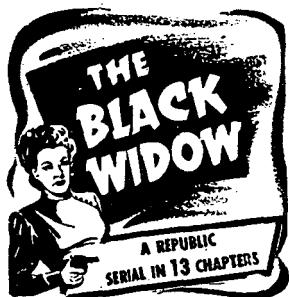
DICK TRACY vs. PHANTOM EMPIRE

Formerly entitled DICK TRACY vs. CRIME, INC.
starring RALPH BYRD • MICHAEL OWEN
JAN WILEY • JOHN DAVIDSON
with RALPH BORGAN

Based on a cartoon strip by CHESTER GOULD
A REPUBLIC SERIAL IN 15 CHAPTERS



Directed by WILLIAM WITNEY • JOHN ENGLISH
Associate Producer W. J. O'SULLIVAN
Original Screen Play By RONALD DAVIDSON • NORMAN S. HALL
WILLIAM LIVELY • JOSEPH O'DONNELL • JOSEPH POLAND
Republic Pictures Corporation — Herbert J. Yates, President



A REPUBLIC
SERIAL IN 13 CHAPTERS

remember winning a metal rifle that loaded up with about twenty rubber bands that you could squeeze off, one by one, as fast as the finger could squeeze the trigger. Wow!

There was no possibility of running out of serials. The studios were cranking them out regularly. From Republic Pictures came **DARKEST AFRICA** with Clyde Beatty; **UNDERSEA KINGDOM** with Ray "Crash" Corrigan and a score of familiar cowboy players dressed in the mini-nightshirts that were the standard costumes of sunken Atlantis; four different **DICK TRACY** adventures, with Ralph Byrd as the hatchet-jawed sleuth; **ZORRO RIDES AGAIN**; **THE LONE RANGER**; **FIGHTING DEVIL DOGS**; **THE DRUMS OF FU MANCHU**; **THE MYSTERIOUS DR. SATAN**; **THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN MARVEL** with Tom Tyler; **SPY SMASHER**; **THE PERILS OF NYOKA**.

Columbia presented us with **FLYING G-MEN**; **MANDRAKE, THE MAGICIAN**, with Warren Hull; **THE SHADOW** played by Victor Jory; **TERRY AND THE PIRATES**; **CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT** starring Dave O'Brien; **THE PHANTOM** with Tom Tyler in the lead.

Universal contributed its share with **TAILSPIN TOMMY**; **THE ADVENTURES OF FRANK MERRIWELL**; **JUNGLE JIM**, with Grant Withers; **SECRET AGENT X-9**; **THE GREEN HORNET**; **JUNIOR G-MEN**, with the Dead-End Kids; **THE ADVENTURES OF SMILIN' JACK**; **BUCK ROGERS**; **FLASH GORDON**, **FLASH GORDON'S TRIP TO MARS**; and **FLASH GORDON CONQUERS THE UNIVERSE**.

HOT ON THE TAIL OF ZOOMING MYSTERY DISCS IN A SPECTACULAR SERIAL ADVENTURE!

BRUCE GENTRY
DAREDEVIL OF THE SKIES

BASED UPON THE FAMOUS
NEWSPAPER FEATURE "BRUCE GENTRY"

with
TOM NEAL
(as Bruce Gentry)

JUDY CLARK
RALPH HODGES
FORREST TAYLOR

Written for the screen by
George H. Plympton, Joseph H.
Poland and Lewis Clay

Directed by
SPENCER DENNEY and THOMAS CARB

Produced by
SAM KATZMAN

A COLUMBIA SERIAL

Thanks to the comic books we were already familiar with many of these, and some of the serials didn't make it smoothly from novels or comics. But Tom Tyler really did resemble **THE PHANTOM** and **CAPTAIN MARVEL**.

Victor Jory looked a lot like **THE SHADOW'S** alter ego, Lamont Cranston. But it was Larry "Buster" Crabbe who seemed to vault right out of the Alex Raymond comic strip to star in the three serials.

Buster Crabbe had the greatest set of flaring nostrils in the business. If Oscars were ever given to noses, he should get two, one for each nostril. Whenever Flash's nose twitched, whenever his nostrils quivered, we knew that something was going to happen. It was an all-purpose schtick which expressed love, hate, anger and anything else that came along. And for some reason they seemed to flare a lot when Dale Arden (played by lovely Jean Rogers) was around, dressed in one of those supersexy clinging costumes worn by the female natives of the planet Mongo.

The low-priced, triple-features-plus Saturday matinees are gone. There's always television, but the best feature about it is that you can turn it off and go take a nap and think about that big cavern of the past filled with enough adventures to make a young mind boggle.

When you pay three or four dollars to get into a movie theater these days you might be greeted by a sign that says **MOVIES ARE BETTER THAN EVER**. Could be — but they're not nearly as much fun!

TERROR RAIDS THE EVERGLADES!

...Stalking the trail of river pirates and their phantom blood ships!

MYSTERY OF THE RIVER BOAT

ROBERT LOWERY
MARJORY CLEMENTS
LYLE TALBOT
EDDIE QUILLAN
FRANCIS McDONALD
ARTHUR HOWL
MANTAN MORELAND

13 TERRIFYING CHAPTERS

*How can you lose when betting on a sure thing? It's
easy, when you know how!*

License To Steal

by ARTHUR MOORE

"WE HAVE FALLEN ON EVIL WAYS," MOURNS GOSPEL KEELY, stomping along sedately, hands folded over his rump. "When we seek to enrich ourselves at our brother's expense . . ."

He means Harry. Me and Gospel have just come from Katzie's Saloon where Harry tried to shake down old Gospel with a two-headed coin.

"He was only pushing to promote a pad for the night," I say.

"It pains me, Dubois." He serves me a sad little smile. "Neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Besides, I sold him that nickel in the first place."

Gospel is doling out the dirge because Harry forgets where he got the crooked coin. But Gospel never forgets anything. He has a memory like an elephant with a secretary. He is a tall, worried-looking specimen who dresses like an undertaker overtaken by gloom, and has squinty little eyes under bunchy, bushy brows and talks through his nose. He has a way of walking like he is a procession — all by himself. Also, mushrooms grow in his shadow.

When he goes to church the holy water boils, but he is able to lull

unsuspecting loogans into losing states with the bible quotes. He will naturally bet on anything and he once rolled a seven the hard way, two threes and a one.

It is a cold January day and the snow which has not already melted to mush is sporting cinder moustaches. A weak little sun is trying to elbow its way through a soggy layer of clouds that promise more of the same.

Gospel is wise that I am working in a horse parlor and have just been paid. I am also sure he knows I have a gold filling in my left upper molar and has plans for it . . . he is a schemer. So when he proposes a wager on a license plate I quick wonder if he has memorized the numbers of all the license plates along the street.

Then I reflect and consider that he has not been out of my sight for an hour, so I say edgily, "What's the bet?"

"I'll wager a deuce on the plate of that blue buggy." He points to a boiler a block away; it is waiting at the curb and the plate number is blocked by another boat. "First number, one to five."

I cannot figure how he can cheat me. I agree. "I'll take six to and including zero."

We are mosying along toward Miz Sherry's Boarding house and the garage where Gospel keeps his heap is across the street. When we walk up to the blue car the first number is a four. Gospel wins, and I shell out sadly.

"We thank thee for these welcome gifts." He chuckles and tucks the lettuce away with the rest of the mintberries which is bulging his leather. He wrinkles his baggy face and raises his black hat to me. I find myself bowing to him like I am passing the casket.

It is in that second the thought hits me like a jar of chop suey in the kisser. I realize with a kind of ice-cold jim-jams that I know something which Gospel does not! Opportunity is screaming in my head like a battered banshee boiled in bat's blood.

MIZ SHERPY'S BEAT-UP BOILER IS PARKED IN FRONT OF THE boarding house and I am hip to the number because I have just put the next year's plates on for her that very morning. I remember the first two numbers are threes.

It is a terrible struggle to stay nonchalant. I have this dingaling desire to dance and kick my heels together, but I know it would only alert old Gospel. Instead I fish out a ten spot and wave it near his nostrils. I am calm as an iron cherub.

"One more wager," I say.

He furrows his features into a smile. "Dubois, you possess the

proper spirit. There is a time to take and a time to lose. Name your proposition."

I point my finger casually. "The white job across from the garage. This tenner on one to five."

"Ahhhh." He squints thoughtfully at the heap.

I say, "Take off the specs, Gospel."

He raises two pounds of eyebrows at me like I am accusing him of shooting Calvin Coolidge. Then he makes a production out of removing the steel rims and depositing same in a vest pocket.

"Depart from me, ye who work iniquity," he intones. "Them is for reading, Dubois, you should doubt my integrity."

Naturally I did not know he had one, but it if is shady then it is probably in his back pocket. He is so slippery that otters and their daughters line up for lessons.

He says, "The whole ten, Dubois? All of it?"

"I would like to make it a Jackson," I reply, not meeting him fish-eyes, "But I do not wish to make it —"

"You're faded!" he rasps. "Twenty dollars is the bet. You got a Jackson, Dubois?" He dives into a pocket and produces one.

I am wallowing in wealth. I am keeping slightly more than seventy berries warm and he gets a glimpse of them as I remove the twenty.

Gospel grasps the lapels of his black frock coat, puts his shaggy head down and strides to the white car. He stops short suddenly like he has been speared when he spots the plate. Unhunching his shoulders, he turns with a pained puss as I troop up. Gospel hates to lose.

"A trey!" he mourns and clutches his breast. I cannot help looking for the blood where he is stabbed. "Truly this is a grief and I must needs bear it!" He sighs like the wind over a lonely grave and passes me the twenty.

It is the only time I have ever took Gospel!

I lock the loot away out of the cold. Gospel raises the black hat again and I catch myself bowing to him. Sighing deeply, he staggers across the street to the garage like he is carrying a letter edged in black to a waiting widow. I have to turn away or I will be feeling sorry for him.

I go inside the boarding house and with the door closed I know I should have squeezed him for a C note. I will never be that lucky again.

LEFT FOOT HAMISH AGREES WITH ME THE NEXT DAY WHEN I tell him how I have snookered Gospel. Left Foot is a harmless little coot who belongs to a string quartet. He and three other guys save string. He is astonished that anyone could separate Gospel from Irish folding flags except with a mask and a gun. He is very respectful when I assure him it was brainwork. But then he is one of them who saves

gnerrs, hoping they will someday come back in style. Gnerrs are the little balls of lint in bellybuttons.

We are thus discussing my miracle when Tergis Beasley shuffles in. He is a round-faced tiddly-wink who was wounded in the war. His knees were scarred crawling past the draft board. He has a high-pitched voice and is convinced the Russians are trying to shut off the sun.

"How come you won't lend me a sawbuck, Dubois?" he starts.

"You didn't ask me."

He frowns. "Oh. Then will you?"

"No," I say. He would only spend it.

He is trying to cudgel an answer when Gospel enters and raises the hat to us. "I see we have a quorum."

"I had 'em when I was a kid," Left Foot says.

"Ah, friends and neighbors, who among us would have the magic pasteboards?" He grabs his lapels and goes into a teeter. "Perhaps a friendly shake of studhorse?"

"All I got is a button," Left Foot admits.

I am edgy about playing Gospel's game. I should stick to what wins for me. I remark, "Maybe we should stick to license plates."

"You bet on license plates?" Tergis says, astonished.

"Only in the most friendly fashion. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself. Do you know your own license number, Tergis old friend?"

I notice all at once that Tergis gets a look in his glassy lamps and lowers his lids to cover same. He says very casual, "You was b-betting on the f-first number?"

"One to five, and six to zero," I tell him.

"A square and level shake," Gospel agrees. "Is your vehicle parked hereabouts?"

Tergis sighs. "It's been outa gas for a week. It's settin' across the street in front of the garage."

Gospel nods and comes dangerously close to a smile. "Then I propose a small wager, a five spot on the first number. You, loyal friend, Tergis, pick the number."

"The f-first number of my license p-plate?"

Gospel nods again. "My five says you cannot remember it." He lays the fin on the table between us.

Tergis clears his throat and whips out a fiver. "I take six to zero," he says very fast. His eyes are bright as new dimes.

Gospel says, "Six to zero. I take one to five." Then he points at me. "Dubois, steadfast pal, do us the honor of hopping out to confirm the

digit. We will wait here with baited breath for your return."

I am eager to duck out. I am positive Tergis will take old Gospel again. Tergis' boiler is leaning against the curb like he said and the first number of the plate is a nine. Gospel is took.

Then fickle fortune clouts me alongside the headbone once more. Lady Luck is nibbling at my ear and whispering a crazy caper! I am shivery with the shining scam! Gospel's garage is only a step away. Does the old slicker know *his* license number?

I hustle into the garage and his two-door yellow heap is standing in a corner. Old man Sully, the garage owner, is sitting in the glassed-in office looking at me over his newspaper. I do not want to make a mistake — Gospel might have sold the car and got another one, so I yell to Sully and ask if that is Gospel's heap. Sully says it is.

The first number of the plate is a one.

WHEN I RUN BACK TO THE KITCHEN TERGIS IS HAPPY AND eager to get the five spot from Gospel . . . who takes the news hard. He shakes his head like he has heard the price of coffins has gone sky high; he pays off, fingering each bill to make sure they are not stuck together.

The game over, Gospel is about to rise when I say, casual as a pick-pocket, "Ah . . . er . . . I was wondering . . ."

"Yes, old faithful friend?" Gospel looks at me over the tops of his cheaters.

"I was wondering, Gospel. Do you know *your* license number?"

He considers this, pursing his lips and cocking his head like a downtrodden beagle. "I will level with you, Dubois. Even a child is known by his doings. I believe the first number on my plate is a . . . is a nine."

I bite my lip and lower my shining eyes. It is not a nine it is a one. It is a ONE!

I cannot look at him. I sit down and clench my hands under the table. It is very hard to believe but I am in a position to take Gospel for the second time!

I hope my voice will not break. I have to swallow several times and when I speak it sounds like a croak, but Gospel does not notice. "I w-will w-wager —"

"Yes," he encourages, "high or low?"

"O-one to five on your plates, Gospel."

He tugs at his lapels, looking round at all of us. Left Foot is staring with his mouth open, at the wonder of it. He is so innocent that people palm things off on him. He got a toothache that way. Tergis is patting

his new fiver. Gospel does not hesitate more than a minute. But he says with less assurance, "I — I think it is a nine . . ."

I am confident now. "For twenty bucks?"

Left Foot squeaks at the heavy action. Gospel gazes over his specs and the trick eyebrows dance up and down. I can see he is startled but staunch though shook. "Could I forget?" He wonders it aloud with a far-away expression.

I know I have got him. "Are you backin' out?"

He picks at a mop of eyebrow, clears his throat and stands up very straight. He hates folks to think he would wilt at a wager. It would impair his image. "I am not, sir," he says very solemn. "I will even up the ante to half a C note."

Left Foot groans and rolls his weak eyes. But he is a loser. He would have lost if he bet on Lindbergh.

I am now bursting with confidence. "And I will raise it to a full C thing! One hunnerd bucks, Gospel. One to five on your plates."

Gospel closes his eyes and his ears twitch. Then he nails it down. "Very well, Dubois. You take one to five on my yellow boiler in Sully's garage. Is that the bet?"

"That's it." I am feeling finer than the feathers on an ivory frog. I fish out my scratch, all of it, including the rent money, and line up a hundred greenies.

Very businesslike he downs an equal amount of gelt and puts a salt shaker on top of the pile.

"Let us all go see, en masse," Gospel intones. "Could I be a ninny about the nine?"

He leads the way outside and across the street, into the garage and up to the yellow car.

I stop and stare at the license plate. It is not a dull blue like last year's — like it was a few minutes ago. It is a nice shiny new one. And the first number is a nine.

GOSPEL SAYS, IN HIS BEST MOURNING VOICE. "I CHARGE YOU all to say whether in truth the first number on this plate affixed to my car is not a nine."

"It's a nine," Tergis says with finality. "Tough luck, Dubois."

With slack jaw I watch the old slicker, Tergis and Left Foot amble back to the kitchen. I am confused and cannot believe it. I am also flat.

"Hey, Dubois!" booms Sully's voice. "What's goin' on?" I look around. He is standing in the doorway with a screwdriver in his hand. He says, "How come Gospel slips me two bucks to change his license plates — after you come into the garage?" ●

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS

by JOHN BALL

An unqualified first prize for ingenious plotting goes this month to James Anderson for his utterly delightful *Assault and Matrimony*. Although this is an exceptionally good crime story, it is also a farce comedy about a husband and wife, supposedly an unusually devoted couple, who are secretly trying their best to murder each other for quite different reasons. Their mutual hatred disguised behind loving politeness is responsible for some dazzling plot twists and highly entertaining reading. The solution, when it finally comes, is most satisfying and suggests that the author was only really getting warmed up. Gosh, we hope so! Come again. Mr. Anderson, and soon. (Double-day Crime Club, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

There is a new 87th Precinct novel this month, which is enough in itself to send many a reader to the bookstore. The title is *Heat* and the author is, of course Ed McBain. When an apparent suicide is discovered under suspicious circumstances, the well-known cops of the 87th go to work. McBain knows his police procedure well and he describes it in meticulous detail. A subplot deals with one of the detectives who is obsessed with the idea that his gorgeous model wife is having extramarital sex. He sets out to investigate in a classic example of not leaving well enough alone. The author enjoys a wide popularity; this new work is one indication why. (Viking, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Joseph Hansen brings back insurance investigator Dave Brandstetter in a new book called *Gravedigger*. Mr. Hansen has a very crisp sharp style with a special gift for taut and pertinent dialogue. This time a young woman is missing and presumed to have been murdered. There is even a body likely to be hers, but the insurance company wants further proof before paying off. The plotting is very good and the action moves along swiftly as the details unfold. One caution: Brandstetter is a homosexual and the close descriptions of his relations with his much younger, black male lover may disturb many readers. The jacket painting, incidentally, is quite attractive, although the reflection shown is impossible. (Holt Rinehart, \$12.50)

☆ ☆ ☆

The appeal of the spy novel never seems to fade; this month we have a new one called *Big Bear, Little Bear* by David Brierley. The scene, as it so often is, is Berlin, just before the Airlift. It is quite well done with British Intelligence as the motivating agency. The Russians are plotting, which is hardly surprising, and once again there is a mole to be detected and uprooted. Mr. Brierley writes very well, and he has a good feeling for the dark profession he depicts. His ending, however, is right out of Le Carre and that is to be regretted. (Scribners, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

A literally invaluable volume for every mystery fan and collector is *Monthly Murders* by Michael L. Cook. This 1147 page book is a monumental piece of scholarship that also has great practical use. It lists, by title and author, the contents of every English language digest-sized mystery magazine from its inception up to the present time. Now if you want to find all the available published work by your favorite author in this format, here is your answer. Mr. Cook has done a staggering amount of work and the completed volume is attractively presented. Even very obscure magazines, long out of print, are represented, as are such well-known publications as *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, the lamented *Saint Mystery Magazine*, and many others. There have been previous listings, particularly those by John Nieminski, but nothing to approach the present work. This much compiling must be regarded as a labor of love, but the fact remains that Mr. Cook has performed an invaluable service for every serious mystery reader and, in so doing, he has created a monumental reference work that is an immediate classic. (Greenwood Press, \$49.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Promises to Keep by Hy and Barbara Brett deals with a former homicide cop and his wife who take up a fresh life as New England antique dealers. There is a nicely complex plot, with some determined neo-Nazis providing the villainy. The story elements are all fitted

neatly together, but the former detective is reluctant to act the part and the F.B.I. men who appear are not like the ones we know. While having a meal together in the middle of the book, the husband and wife deliver long political speeches to each other that, regardless of context, don't belong in a work of this kind. Otherwise, a promising debut by this new writing team. (Harper and Row, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Caroline Crane writes strictly for a feminine audience in *Wife Found Slain*. She starts off with a bang, as a young woman finds herself in a hospital with no idea why she is there. After that the story bogs down for 150 pages of the too familiar "office wife" tale; there is even the unreconciled stepdaughter we have so often met elsewhere. When the climax finally comes, there are no surprises. Miss Crane has entertained us more in other works. (Dodd Mead, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Unique in its way is Philip Lauben's *A Nice Sound Alibi* in which we meet the two man homicide team in a small Kentucky city. The captain and his assistant could be perfectly played by the late Clifton Webb and Andy Griffin. When the captain is called on Saturday afternoon to investigate a killing, he replies that he will come promptly — right after church on Sunday. But the team does get things done. There is some wry writing in which the aristocratic (by birth) captain and his not overly educated assistant carry on and do their job. It's a different team and a good one. There isn't a great deal of action, and no blood-boiling murders, but the book is a lot of fun, and some good detection is included. (St. Martins, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

A GLANCE BACKWARD: If you missed it when it first came out, go back and read *The Rosary Murders* by William Kienzie. It's a wonderfully gory tale of multiple murder that tantalizes the reader on every page as the plot is slowly revealed. Top drawer all the way. Andrews and McMeel hardback, also in paperback.

☆ ☆ ☆

PAPERBACK NOTES: Eric Ambler's *The Levanter* and *Doctor Frigo* are now available in quality paperback from Atheneum. Same as the hardback, but in soft covers for \$7.95 each. Three by Patricia Highsmith are new from Penguin: *a Suspension of Mercy* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* are \$3.50; *A Dog's Ransom* is \$2.95. Bantam offers two Rex Stout classics, *The Red Box* and *Black Orchids* at \$2.50 each. For \$2.25 Bantam has Carter Dickson's memorable *Death in Five Boxes* and *The Skeleton in the Clock*, both highly recommended. Dell has made available Jonathan Gash's *Gold by Gemini*, which is all about antiques of course, for \$2.25.

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A black and white movie poster for the film 'Shadow of Chinatown'. The poster features a large, stylized face of Bela Lugosi at the top left, with a menacing expression. Below him are several smaller portraits of the other cast members, including Herman Brix, Luana Walters, Joan Barclay, and Maurice Liu. The title 'Shadow of Chinatown' is prominently displayed in the center. The text 'Thrills and Chills and Shivering Shocks as a Crazy Scientist Terrorizes the Underworld!' is written in a dramatic, gothic-style font at the top right. The bottom of the poster features the number '15' and the words 'THRILLING CHAPTERS'.

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